

Edited by Luca Illetterati & Giovanna Miolli



THE RELEVANCE OF
HEGEL'S
CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY

**From Classical German Philosophy
to Contemporary Metaphilosophy**

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The Relevance of Hegel's Concept of Philosophy

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The Relevance of Hegel's Concept of Philosophy

*From Classical German Philosophy to
Contemporary Metaphilosophy*

Edited by
Luca Illetterati and Giovanna Miolli

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Abbreviations

Hegel's works are cited by page, section or paragraph (§) number; Hegel's remarks (*Anmerkungen*) to his sections are cited by an accompanying 'R' (e.g. EL, §140 R); Hegel's additions (*Zusätze*) with 'A' (e.g. EL, §140 A). Citations of additions, remarks and sections are separated with a comma. For example (EL, §140, R, A) would refer to a citation of the section, its remark and the addition. Where there are multiple remarks or additions to a single section, a number is placed after 'R' or 'A' (e.g. EL, §136 A2).

English translations of Hegel's works

If more than one translation is available, the translation used by the author will be indicated in an endnote within the chapter.

- DIFF. *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977.
- E17 *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, and Critical Writings*, ed. E. Behler, trans. A.V. Miller, S.A. Taubeneck and D. Behler. New York: Continuum, 1990.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.
- EL *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris. Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge: Hackett, 1991.
Hegel's Logic: Part One of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences (1830), trans. W. Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.
- EPM *Philosophy of Mind (Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)), together with the Zusätze*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revised with introduction and commentary by M.J. Inwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
Philosophy of Mind (Part Three of The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)), together with the Zusätze, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.
- EPN *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), 3 vols, trans. M.J. Petry. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970.

Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.

- ETW *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
- FK *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- LA *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols, trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- LE *The Letters*, trans. C. Butler and C. Seiler, with commentary by C. Butler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- LHP I–III *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825–6*, 3 vols, ed. and trans. R.F. Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- LHP1 I–III *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983.
Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3 vols, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson. London: Kegan Paul, 1896.
- LPG *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, trans. P.C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- LPR I–III *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- LPWH *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- NRPS *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right*, trans. J.M. Stewart and P.G. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right, trans. J.M. Stewart and P.G. Hodgson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- PC *The Critical Journal, Introduction: On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy*, in G. di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, 272–291. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000.
- PR *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, ed. and revised S. Houlgate. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
Elements of the Philosophy of Right, ed. A. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.
- PS *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans., with introduction and commentary, M. Inwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
The Phenomenology of Spirit, ed. and trans. T. Pinkard and M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- PSS I–III *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Being §§ 377–482 of Part Three of The Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences (1830) with Zusätze and Including Two Fragments; 'A Fragment on the Philosophy of Spirit (1822/5)' and 'The Phenomenology of Spirit (Summer Term, 1825)'*, 3 vols, trans. M.J. Petry. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1978.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.

- PW *Political Writings*, ed. L. Dickey and H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- SEL *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*, trans. H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.
- SL *Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Science of Logic, trans. A.V. Miller. Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 1999.
- SP *On the Relation between Skepticism and Philosophy. Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One*, trans. H.S. Harris, in G. di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, 311–362. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000.

Complete editions of Hegel's works

- GW *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler. Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–.
- W *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969–1971; 1986.

German editions of Hegel's work

- AEST. *Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik. Vorlesungsmitschrift Adolf Heimann (1828/1829)*, ed. A.P. Olivier and A. Gethmann-Siefert. Munich: Fink, 2017.
- Briefe I–V *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 5 vols, ed. J. Hoffmeister and F. Nicolin. Hamburg: Meiner, 1969–1981.
- DIFF, GW4 *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, GW4, ed. H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler, 1–92, 1968.
- DIFF, W2 *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen System der Philosophie*, W2, 52–137, 1986.
- ENZ *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*, GW20, ed. W. Bonsiepen and H.-C. Lucas, 1992.
Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen, W8–10, 1986.
Cited by section (§) number unless otherwise stated.
- ENZ 17 *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1817)*, GW13, ed. W. Bonsiepen and K. Grotzsch, 2000.
- FS *Frühe Schriften*, GW2, ed. W. Jaeschke, 2014.
- GuW, GW4 *Glauben und Wissen*, GW4, ed. H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler, 313–414, 1968.
- GPR, GW14.1 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, GW14.1, ed. K. Grotzsch and E. Weisser-Lohmann, 2009.
- GPR, W7 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, W7, 1986.
- HV *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983ff.

- JS I *Jenaer Systementwürfe I*, GW6, ed. K. Düsing and H. Kimmerle, 1975.
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- SuE, GW15 *Schriften und Entwürfe I (1817–1825)*, GW15, ed. F. Hogemann and C. Jamme, 1990.
- VG *Die Vernunft in die Geschichte*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1994.
- VGP I–III *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I–III*, W18–20, 1986.
- VGPE *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Teil 1. Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie. Orientalische Philosophie*, ed. W. Jaeschke. Hamburg: Meiner, 1993.
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- VPR I–III *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 3 volumes, ed. W. Jaeschke. Hamburg: Meiner, 1993–1995.
- VPWG *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Band I: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Meiner, 1994.
- VR 1822–23 *Philosophie des Rechts: Nach der Vorlesungsanschrift von H. G. Hotho 1822/23, in Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818–1831*, vol. 3, ed. K.H. Ilting. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1973.
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- WdL, W5 *Wissenschaft der Logik I: Erster Teil: Die objektive Logik, Erstes Buch*, W5, 1986.
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Why Hegel's Metaphilosophy Matters: An Introduction

Luca Illetterati and Giovanna Miolli

This volume is devoted to exploring Hegel's concept of philosophy, its relevance to current philosophical discussions and its possibility of productively interacting with other philosophical traditions. On this journey, comparisons with contemporary metaphilosophical thought are inevitable. Examining the nature of philosophy forms an essential part of philosophical theorizing today in an ongoing effort to understand (and reinvent) what this discipline *is* or *should be*.

For some decades now, we have witnessed a growing interest in Hegel's speculation and its critical, creative potential to inspire new philosophical positions. This renewed attention to Hegel's thought has usually been directed at specific parts of his philosophical production. Many scholars, for instance, have concentrated on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, drawing on its potential to offer crucial insights into core issues of contemporary philosophical debate, such as self-consciousness, recognition and the sociality of reason, as well as its historicity and its characteristically inferential structure. Others have focused on distinct parts of Hegel's system, especially on the philosophy of right and the conception of normativity as well as on the philosophy of art, primarily elaborating on the idea of the so-called end of art. Recently, Hegel's logic has also attracted significantly greater interest, both in terms of its potential proximity to paraconsistent logics and its relation to metaphysics.

This focus on specific themes of Hegelian thought from a perspective that is not merely historical-reconstructive but deliberately places Hegel in a strong relationship with today's philosophical discussions implicitly presupposes a rediscovery of his distinctive way of understanding philosophical thinking and practice. However, a focused, extended treatment of Hegel's metaphilosophy – namely, of his conception of what philosophy is,¹ how it develops and how it relates to other disciplines and forms of human production – remains to be done.²

One reason for this absence might be the systematic structure of Hegel's philosophy itself. In the (not so recent but still provocative) article 'What Is Hegel's Legacy and What Should We Do with It?' (1999), Rolf-Peter Horstmann illustrated an aporetic situation that he thought characterized present-day Hegelian studies. According to Horstmann, the contemporary interpreter of Hegel must deal with an illusory dilemma: either 'save' the parts of Hegel's speculation considered useful and topical,

thus renouncing the systematic whole, or opt for the latter, which risks facing some of Hegel's aspects, principles and convictions that could create serious embarrassment for contemporary readers.³

In the course of Horstmann's argument, this dilemma soon becomes a dead end. On the one hand, isolating certain aspects of Hegelian elaboration – mostly his sociopolitical thought but also parts of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the introductory reflections to the actual treatises – proves to be fundamentally incorrect, as these aspects are rooted in the very whole that has been discarded. They are what they are, and they show themselves according to the characteristics that Hegel attributes to them precisely because of the speculative totality that supports them, which is articulated according to specific ontological, methodological and epistemological directives. Extrapolating these parts because they are considered useful for the purposes of contemporary reflection is ill-advised, as it ignores (deliberately or not) that their meaning arises from the context in which Hegel inserted them. The underlying assumption of such a discourse is that one cannot consider one part of Hegelian speculation without thereby considering the entire system that has generated it. On the other hand, Horstmann argued that to embrace Hegel's philosophy as a whole and thus accept the ontological, methodological and epistemological claims that form its backbone is, for a contemporary philosopher, simply inadmissible.⁴ It seems that wherever one wants to go, therefore, the way is precluded, particularly in attempts to update Hegelian philosophy.

The challenge of this volume is to take on the radical character of Hegel's conception of philosophy – together with its implication for all the aspects related to it (theoretical, historical, ethical, political and connected to art, religion and the sciences) – and explore how it 'reacts' to contemporary interrogation and vice versa. Beyond simply making Hegel topical, we mobilize aspects of his 'philosophy of philosophy' that may stimulate contemporary thought while also revealing its assumptions that go unquestioned. In this sense, the attempt to account for the relevance of Hegel's conception of philosophy also entails a critical dimension, capable of bringing to light the limits and idiosyncrasies of how philosophy is understood today.

To this end, this volume offers a wide-ranging account of Hegel's metaphilosophy from various angles, relating this material to other philosophical traditions and to present metaphilosophical debates. Hegel's reflections on the nature, scope, articulation, object and method of philosophy can fruitfully interact with contemporary metaphilosophical debates. Specifically, it can significantly contribute to much-discussed topics, such as the scientificity of philosophy and its relation to the natural, experimental sciences; the relation between philosophy and the history of philosophy; and the relation between the theoretical and practical dimensions of philosophy. Before expanding upon Hegel's contributions to present issues in metaphilosophical debates, however, a brief insight into the nature of metaphilosophy may be useful.

Metaphilosophy and the fate of philosophy

'Metaphilosophy' is a recent word for an ancient theoretical practice. At least from Plato's speculation onwards, philosophy has questioned its own 'nature', making it somewhat redundant today to emphasize this aspect (though it could be informative of

philosophy when compared with other disciplines).⁵ Contrariwise, the need to isolate a specific name for philosophy's investigation of itself and to clearly circumscribe the scope of this self-reflective activity is new and symptomatic of the extraordinary fragmentation of twentieth-century philosophical discourse, what Michael Friedman has called 'a parting of the ways' (2000). This fragmentation revealed what Arthur C. Danto beautifully portrayed in his essay 'Philosophizing Literature' (which is itself of a metaphilosophical kind): 'Philosophy in the twentieth century may be exactly defined by the kind of problem it has become for itself' (1986: 167). As a result, the emergence of a 'larger self-detached perspective' (Rescher 2014: xi) investigating the nature of philosophy led to the establishment of metaphilosophy as a new, recognizable philosophical branch.

Metaphilosophical inquiry addresses many much-debated issues related to philosophy's aims, tasks, mission, objects, methods, languages, styles, approaches, limits and prospects. Other topics include the relation of philosophy to other disciplines in general – particularly the natural sciences – as well as its relevance to society and individuals. All these topics are investigated in the attempt to give philosophy 'a self-image that does it justice' (Williamson 2007: ix).

However, before even considering the scope of this discipline, one must confront the problematic status of metaphilosophy. As a self-detached analysis, it seems to stand beyond (or above) philosophy. Just as metaphysics has been traditionally understood as a discipline that transcends or exceeds what physics can tell us, the idea of metaphilosophical inquiry might encourage imagining a level of investigation transcending philosophy. Indeed, the question is tricky. Many issues in metaphilosophical debates are somewhat amphibious. Questions about whether philosophy is useful for society, whether it is useful in general or even whether it is a proper science can also be answered with predominantly sociological, classificatory or political tools, thus becoming judgements about philosophy conducted from an external perspective. The risk of interpreting metaphilosophy as an activity outside philosophy leads Timothy Williamson to prefer the expression 'the philosophy of philosophy' to emphasize that investigating the nature of philosophy is nothing different from philosophy itself: nothing outside or above it (Williamson 2007: ix). Today, the idea that metaphilosophy is 'the project of examining philosophy itself from a philosophical point of view' (Rescher 2014: xi) is well established; however, this was not so obvious at its origins, when the metaphilosophical enterprise primarily represented an effort to ground and justify philosophy.

Indeed, one might wonder why a certain kind of reflection that previously did not need to be explicitly named later emerged with the status of an autonomous philosophical discipline. It is both ironic and profoundly serious, having to do with the (scientific) legitimacy of philosophy, the rethinking of its mission and the demand for a methodological revolution combined with a reconsideration of philosophy's objects of investigation.

Twentieth-century attempts to reconstruct or even replace philosophy responded to the need for a justification of the philosophical enterprise in its own domain and in terms of societal and scientific legitimation, especially in its confrontation with science and more empirical disciplines. The conceptual terrain for philosophers' radical questioning of their own discipline was already mature in the first decades of

the century. Take works such as Edmund Husserl's *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (1911) or, on the other side of the ocean, John Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920, republished in 1948 with the revised title *Reconstruction of Philosophy*).

Even though the elements were already in place for the emergence of metaphilosophy and the term itself had already seen occasional use in different languages,⁶ it gained visibility and started to be used in a technical sense in the late 1960s in Anglophone analytic settings. In those years, Richard Rorty was holding a seminar at Princeton examining many of the ideas that would later appear in *The Linguistic Turn* (1967). His seminar inspired a young scholar, Terrell Ward Bynum, to launch the journal *Metaphilosophy* in 1970, which aimed to create a venue for scholarly dialogue 'about the nature of philosophy, or how the different schools or branches of philosophy relate to each other, or how philosophy relates to other disciplines' (Bynum 2011: 186).

The appearance of explicit metaphilosophy and its connection with both the emergence and criticism of linguistic philosophy highlight a certain structural characteristic of metaphilosophical reflection: its focus on methodological and foundational issues. The 'view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use' (Rorty 1992: 3) points the finger at philosophy's methodology and the status of its objects. In the twentieth century, such problems arose with increased urgency, as the very future of philosophy was at stake. The ultimate question was whether philosophy would continue to exist or would have to give way to another kind of theoretical activity, a Wittgensteinian need for a reconstruction or even a revolution of philosophy that would act 'against philosophy as a pseudo-science' (Rorty 1992: 23) in the knowledge that, once this purge was carried out, something like philosophy might no longer exist.

At the same time, the methodological problem was (and is) also linked to foundational concerns. The 'idea that philosophical problems can be dissolved by detecting the "logic of our language"' (Rorty 1992: 373) manifested in the search for something prior to and more fundamental than philosophy that was able to advance it or make it superfluous. The linguistic project reflected the problematic outcomes of the debates on these foundational issues that characterized early twentieth-century philosophy and that produced various attempts to place the burden of a foundational role for philosophy on the shoulders of either logic or semantics.

In the 1992 re-edition of *The Linguistic Turn*, Rorty included two additional essays (meaningfully and gravely entitled 'Ten Years After' and 'Twenty-Five Years After') in which he expressed his verdict on the failure of the linguistic project, which, according to him, did not succeed in fulfilling its goal to convert philosophy into a strict science (see Rorty 1992: 33). This failure was primarily a methodological bankruptcy, with consequences for the very possibility of defining philosophy and its objects. Such an outcome and the historicist trajectory Rorty had embraced drove him to resist the idea 'that philosophy is a special field of inquiry distinguished by a special method' (1992: 374) and by problems *distinctively* philosophical, 'as naming a natural kind' (1992: 371). 'Questions about "the method of philosophy" or about "the nature of philosophical problems"' had simply proved to be 'unprofitable' (Rorty 1992: 374).

Ultimately, the rise of metaphilosophy is closely related to the need for a revolution in philosophical methods and brings to the foreground issues about the foundation of philosophy, its right to exist and its legitimation on a scientific level.

More recently, despite Rorty's warning, contemporary (meta)philosophers have not seemed inclined to give up questions about the method and objects of philosophy.⁷ The thorny issue of philosophy's scientificity still requires much ink and thought, and philosophy's relation to other branches of knowledge (especially the natural sciences) is a crucial topic today in understanding the limits of philosophy – its capacity to determine and ground itself or its need to rely on other disciplines as crutches. Since the 1960s, much has changed in terms of the details and contents of proposed metaphilosophical theories, but the main questions still persist. Two topics in particular never seem to be exhausted: the question of method and philosophy's (problematic) scientificity.

Philosophy's scientificity and the question of method

Philosophy seems to be structurally marked by a frustrating condition. As Husserl put it in *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, on the one hand, philosophy has repeatedly claimed for itself the status of a rigorous science, but on the other, it has never been able to fulfil this expectation. This is not an unprecedented thought in the history of philosophy, which is 'punctuated by revolts against the practices of previous philosophers and by attempts to transform philosophy into science – a discipline in which universally recognized decision-procedures are available for testing philosophical theses' (Rorty 1992: 1).

The relationship between the methods of the empirical, experimental sciences and philosophical procedures is one of the most challenging problems philosophy has faced since the early seventeenth century, with the rise of modern experimental science. To make a long story short, philosophers had to conform to a radically new idea of science and figure out how their discipline had to be transformed or at least reformed to preserve its 'scientific' character.⁸ The modern era has indeed confronted philosophy with a dilemma that does not yet seem resolved: either philosophy must surrender claims to scientificity or must model itself on the natural sciences.

Today, this dilemma attends to the question of *naturalism* in philosophy (a single label for many positions). Intrinsic to this question is the discussion about whether philosophy should be understood as a humanistic discipline or a scientific enterprise. Naturalist philosophers perceive philosophy in continuity with science or even favour its assimilation to the latter, encouraging the employment of the standard methods of empirical science.⁹ Other authors charge this position with *scientism*: 'a misunderstanding of the relations between philosophy and the natural sciences which tends to assimilate philosophy to the aims, or at least the manners, of the sciences' (Williams 2006: 182). This criticism does not imply, however, that philosophy should be uninterested or uninvolved in the sciences, but it is a different matter to claim that philosophy should shape itself according to them. Positions exist in between, according

to some of which philosophy is a science – a logic of concepts (e.g. McGinn 2015) – without being assimilated to the natural or social sciences.¹⁰

A vital point in addressing the scientificity of philosophy is the methodological question. A typically modern approach to the problem is that, in addition to the object of investigation, evaluating the correct method of conducting that investigation is increasingly important. Determining the methods and objects of philosophy also entails determining its scientific nature and consequently the relationship between philosophy and science.

Hegel himself recognized the problematic nature of philosophy in relation to the notion of science: in the opening paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia* (1830), he stated that philosophy cannot enjoy the 'advantage from which the other sciences benefit, namely the ability to *presuppose* both its *objects* as immediately endorsed by representation of them and an acknowledged *method* of knowing, which would determine its starting-point and progression' (EL, §1). Philosophical activity necessarily implies the justification of both. Between the lines, this aspect actually indicates added value for Hegel, as it is precisely this process of justification that guarantees philosophy a scientific status.

Whether one agrees with Hegel or not, his reflections are not misplaced. A brief look at the history of philosophy makes it obvious that philosophy cannot assume its methods and objects as given. Indeed, 'it isn't obviously the case that there is a particular region of objects (like stars and planets or diseases of the skin) that philosophers make it their special business to study' (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 2) and the question about what method(s) philosophy should apply to achieve real knowledge about the objects it investigates produces the same discomfort.

Nicholas Rescher individuated philosophy's scope as the "big questions" that we have regarding the world's scheme of things and our place within it' (2014: 1). This is nevertheless too general a picture to appreciate the (possibly) unique nature of the objects of philosophy. Big questions about the world and human condition are likely to cover an infinite number of subject matters; moreover, many topics can also be examined by other disciplines, thus demonstrating that the objects that philosophy investigates have nothing *distinctively* philosophical about them in the sense of making up 'a natural kind'.

Against this backdrop, we could ask whether philosophy's distinctive character is rather to be found in its method(s). The multiplicity of philosophical methods that have been developed historically, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, illuminates the arduousness of justifying a completely affirmative answer.¹¹ Williamson's words seem appropriate here: 'Forget the idea of a single method ... philosophers use methods of various kinds: they philosophize in various ways' (2007: 3).

The evidence that we cannot guarantee a method upon which all (or at least most) philosophers agree is not the only impediment. In recent years, a new branch of philosophy has emerged – experimental philosophy – which complicates things even further.

Despite divergences in styles, conceptions and methods, until a few decades ago, most philosophy practitioners would have agreed that 'the activity of philosophizing differed in significant ways from the typical activities of empirical scientists' (D'Oro and Overgaard 2017: 1). Naturalists themselves, despite their theories, 'did not necessarily

do philosophy any differently from the way it had traditionally been done: in the main without relying substantively on – let alone actively collecting – empirical data' (D'Oro and Overgaard 2017: 1).

Nevertheless, the ascription of *a priori* methods to philosophy and of *a posteriori* methods to the empirical sciences is no longer obvious. With the rise of experimental philosophy,¹² as opposed to armchair philosophy, the situation has changed. While armchair philosophy relies on methods that can be developed and applied while sitting in an armchair 'without any special interaction with the world beyond the armchair, such as measurement, observation or experiment would typically involve' (Williamson 2007: 1), experimental philosophy is based on the idea that it is necessary 'to test philosophical thought experiments and philosophers' intuitions about them with scientific methods, mostly taken from psychology and the social sciences' (Horvath and Grundmann 2012: 1). Accordingly, philosophical theses or arguments, especially in the philosophy of mind and moral philosophy, should be verified empirically exploiting experimental data.¹³ The main risk implied by experimental philosophy (evaluating the use of concepts employing experimental data) is that philosophy collapses into the fields of other disciplines by borrowing their methods, thus reinforcing the belief that it cannot 'usefully proceed until the experiments are done' (Williamson 2007: 6).

In the face of these difficulties, a conception of philosophy that eliminates its irreducible uniqueness might seem preferable. This position finds its best expression in Timothy Williamson's thesis about the 'unexceptional nature of philosophy'. In his work *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, he firmly criticized 'the common assumption of philosophical exceptionalism' (2007: 3). This theoretical move excluded any philosophical 'natural kind', to borrow Rorty's terminology. Against arguments for philosophy's exceptional nature, he maintained that 'the philosophical ways of thinking are not different in kind from the other ways' (Williamson 2007: 4) and that 'the differences in subject matter between philosophy and the other sciences are also less deep than is often supposed' (2007: 3). As with philosophical procedures, 'philosophical questions are not different in kind from other questions' (2007: 4).¹⁴

Even in rejecting the idea of substantial differences between philosophical methods and the methods of other disciplines, however, Williamson remained a defender of armchair philosophy. He believed that rethinking philosophy's methodology did not necessarily imply that philosophy should model itself on the empirical sciences. At the same time, 'that philosophy *can* be done in an armchair does not entail that it *must* be done in an armchair' (Williamson 2007: 6). In his view, the results of scientific, empirical experiments may be relevant to philosophical investigations, but philosophy could nevertheless proceed without them.

Interestingly, this understanding of philosophy as unexceptional is equally a move to legitimize and reaffirm it against approaches that assume natural science as the model of theoretical construction to which philosophical activity should conform. In this picture, philosophy is not more – and much more importantly, not less – than the natural and social sciences. In a sense, Williamson's book developed a discourse that presents philosophy as 'simply' a specific discipline – just as other scientific disciplines are – and thus as self-determining in the formation of its own practices, methods and scientific communities.

Seeing philosophy as a discipline amongst others certainly has salutary implications, as it dismantles philosophy's claim to be 'par excellence, the repository of thought' – a persuasion that 'has fuelled an unnecessary and unmotivated opposition to science' in the past (Parrini 2018: 13–14). Nevertheless, a discourse pointing to philosophy's unexceptionalism (in a context where, at the end of the day, no discipline is exceptional) might have the externality of 'normalizing' philosophy, deflating its possibly original contributions. If philosophy is supposed to do more or less the same work as other disciplines but with inferior results and credibility, then what is the point of philosophy at all? Arguing for the unexceptional nature of philosophy, though bypassing some theoretical difficulties, may not be enough to prevent philosophical practice from falling into the gravitational field of the social and empirical sciences.

Hegel's metaphilosophy

Hegel's case is meaningful for metaphilosophical reflection for at least two reasons: how he approached philosophy and how his provocative conception of philosophy challenges our philosophical patterns, convictions and classifications.

Hegel came late to philosophy after being extremely sceptical and polemical about it. He showed up with a theoretical position in the philosophical debate of his time comparatively late. In fact, his early writings were primarily intended as a cultural critique that also targeted philosophy understood as an abstract exercise of the intellect (*Verstand*). His late entry into the public philosophical debate does not mean, of course, that he did not engage in philosophical questions in his youth. However, until roughly the age of 30 (in 1800), he did not conceive of his own intellectual enterprise as fully intrinsic to philosophy. Rather, he judged philosophy as an intellectualistic form of knowledge unable to grasp the concreteness and dynamism of historical actuality and, for this very reason, equally incapable of acting effectively on the lives and concrete experience of human beings.

This is an element that makes Hegel's metaphilosophical position particularly interesting: his reflection on the nature of philosophy started from a sceptical standpoint, aimed at producing a genuine critique of philosophy's limits. At the same time, his criticism contained ideas about what philosophical activity should accomplish and the fundamental theoretical and practical elements that would later converge into his philosophical system.

In a well-known letter to Schelling dated 2 November 1800, Hegel depicted his training path, giving us a vivid image of a tension between different theoretical drives apparently not quite compatible with each other.

In my scientific development, which started from [the] more subordinate needs of man, I was inevitably driven toward science, and the ideal of [my] youth had to take the form of reflection and thus at once of a system. I now ask myself, while I am still occupied with it, what return to intervention in the life of men can be found.

(LE, 64)

This much-quoted excerpt allows us to appreciate the constitutive theoretical orientations Hegel had developed in his youth that shaped his later conception of philosophy. Specifically, two aspects emerge: an attention to the more subordinate needs of human beings (which testify to the theoretical path undertaken during his formative years) and a new focus on science and its systematic form (which represents the new direction Hegel took in his maturity).

Beside these aspects, as a key connecting element, is the question about the possibility of science or philosophy effectively affecting the lives of human beings. Indeed, the young Hegel was driven by a twofold theoretical need: on the one hand, he sought to analyse the forms of division and laceration that, according to him, pervaded modernity (hence his talk of the more subordinate needs of humans); on the other, his scrutiny also aimed to grasp the elements from which those lacerating experiences had originated to think of possible ways to overcome them.

There is already much metaphilosophical substance here. In Hegel's vision, effective philosophy is called to transform the lives of individuals by providing them with critical conceptual tools to surmount abstract forms of life and imagine or model new ones. The point here is the transformative work of philosophy, which cannot be limited to therapeutic activity but, based on rational critique, must also be creative and productive. Moreover – and this is the challenge – such transformative work must be integrated into and conciliated with systematic science.

Here, we come to the second point mentioned above: the thought-provoking potential of Hegel's concept of philosophy as a systematic whole. This intersects with foundational issues with philosophy, its scientific status, its relation to the other sciences, its historical development, questions of its method, concerns about its autonomy and its connection to freedom. Hegel's late systematic conception of philosophy especially touches on most of the issues raised by contemporary metaphilosophy.

Hegel challenges us on several fronts, calling into question some convictions and commonplaces of today's philosophical debates. He forces us to think about how philosophy can be essentially scientific and in continuity with the other sciences while distinguishing itself from their epistemology. Hegel's view on this point can be regarded as an attempt to justify and ground philosophy, resisting the idea of its 'normalization' through its reduction or elevation – depending on the perspective – to the status of a particular science.

In addition, Hegel invites us to conceive of philosophy as 'the science of freedom' (E17, §5), where freedom means embracing the radical impossibility of philosophy to ground itself on something other than itself as well as the process of transforming presuppositions into posited determinations within philosophy's self-justifying rational development.

To continue, Hegel requires us to rediscuss philosophy's complex relationship with its history and, jointly, the relationship between conceptual determinations and time. His position defies the mainstream dichotomy today between philosophy as a theoretical production of theses and arguments, on the one hand, and the history of philosophy as a rational reconstruction of past theories, on the other. The first stance seems to imply that philosophy does not need history or the historical-conceptual reconstruction of past philosophies. Simultaneously, the history of philosophy, aiming

to be rigorous, conceives of itself as a neutral theoretical enterprise above the fray of philosophical debates and decisions. Hegel's position radically questions such a 'quiet' division of labour. For Hegel, philosophy separated from its historical development is only an abstraction incapable of understanding the world in its concrete, historical complexity. Indeed, the history of philosophy as a purely neutral operation is just an attempt to destroy philosophy, with the hidden purpose of showing that it is nothing at all in itself. According to Hegel, a history of philosophy that claims philosophical neutrality can in fact only highlight philosophy's inability to achieve substantial results and to overcome the status of a sterile, continuous juxtaposition of theories.

Against this background, this volume contains the writing of twenty-six scholars from diverse schools of Hegelian thought investigating Hegel's concept of philosophy to bring it to bear on contemporary metaphilosophical debates. Ultimately, this volume's claim is that Hegel's philosophical perspective on philosophy itself offers a significant, insightful contribution to these discussions.

The volume comprises four parts. Part One, 'Hegel's Metaphilosophy', includes contributions that bring Hegel's conception of philosophy under the lens of multifaceted examination. Some specific aspects are considered: Hegel's overall metaphilosophical project; his conception of the scientificity of philosophy as a self-grounding rational process; the development and novelty of his philosophical method; and his conception of philosophy's connection with critique and freedom. Part Two, 'Hegel's Metaphilosophy and its Aesthetic, Religious and Historical-Political Dimensions', concentrates on Hegel's view on philosophy's relation to other forms of human production such as art and religion, as well as to the social and political aspects of human life. This section also investigates Hegel's explanation of the relationship between philosophy, time and the history of philosophy. Part Three, 'Hegel's Metaphilosophy in Context', considers Hegel's metaphilosophical view within the context of classical German philosophy (here represented by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling). Part Four, 'Hegel's Metaphilosophy and Contemporary Thought', extends this perspective, intersecting Hegel's 'philosophy of philosophy' with more recent philosophical strands and traditions: pragmatism, the historicist tradition, quietism, the recent prolific wave of so-called Pittsburgh neo-Hegelianism, Critical Theory, naturalism, contemporary metaphysics, 'post-analytic' philosophy and contemporary metaphilosophy. This path brings Hegel's metaphilosophical reflection into dialogue with twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophers, such as Robert Brandom, Jacques Derrida, Jean Hyppolite, Rahel Jaeggi, Alexandre Kojève, Alexandre Koyré, John McDowell, Robert Pippin, Richard Rorty, Wilfrid Sellars and others.

Of course, this volume has no claim to exhaustiveness. It represents a first, still-incomplete attempt to draw attention to the impressive metaphilosophical dimension of Hegel's philosophy, probing some of its central aspects and their relevance to contemporary debates. The hope is to show how Hegel's (philosophy of) philosophy ceaselessly regenerates its power to trigger questions, prise open conceptual rigidities and push towards a critical, imaginative rethinking of philosophical theory and practice.

Notes

- 1 Considering Hegelian thought in its development, it would perhaps be more correct to speak of metaphilosophical *conceptions*, emphasizing the plural. Notoriously, the conception of philosophy that characterizes Hegel's early thought is different from that of the late Hegel. On the conception of philosophy in the first phase of Hegel's speculation, see Harris (1971, 1983). For simplicity's sake, we will use the singular here, always bearing in mind Hegel's evolution of his understanding of philosophy.
- 2 There is comparatively little secondary literature *expressly* referring to Hegel's metaphilosophy, see, for example, Berthold-Bond (1986), Ware (1996), Markis (2004), Illetterati (2013), Halbig (2015), Miolli (2017), Kreines (2012, 2017) and Siani (2020). What is more, there is only one book dedicated to the specific topic of Hegel's metaphilosophy (Theunissen 2014), which is mostly centred on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
- 3 In particular, for Horstmann, the idea of systematicity characterizing Hegel's philosophy is connected to three main claims: ontological, methodological and epistemological, which are amongst the aspects of Hegel's speculation that risk having 'no intrinsic value for us anymore' (1999: 277).
- 4 According to Horstmann, the reason for this impossibility is that 'our understanding of what one should do in philosophy has changed' (1999: 281) – which is another way of saying that our metaphilosophical convictions have shifted substantially.
- 5 See Rescher (2014: xi): 'The key fact about metaphilosophy is that it forms a part of philosophy itself. This is a unique feature of the enterprise: the philosophy of biology is not a part of biology, the philosophy of mathematics is not a part of mathematics.'
- 6 Morris Lazerowitz (1970: 1), a student of Wittgenstein, claimed to have invented the English word 'metaphilosophy' in 1940. Concerns have been raised about this claim: equivalent expressions have been used in other languages before 1940, in particular referring to Martin Heidegger and Karl Marx (see Joll 2017: Section B). For a reconstruction of the conceptual history of the term, see Geldsetzer (1974, 1989), Rescher (1985, 2001, 2014), Theunissen (2014), and Joll (2017).
- 7 A particular emphasis on method permeates much metaphilosophical literature. Rorty noted that revolutions (or revolts) in the history of philosophy have typically been accompanied by attempts to adopt new methods (see Rorty 1992: 1). The subtitle of *The Linguistic Turn* itself is *Essays in Philosophical Method*. In referring to his book *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Timothy Williamson states that he had considered 'using the phrase "philosophical method" in the title' (2007: ix). Rescher (2006: 1) argued that the definitive aim of metaphilosophy is 'to study the methods' of philosophy itself 'in an endeavor to illuminate its promise and prospects'. For a detailed overview on the methodological question in philosophy, see D'Oro and Overgaard (2017).
- 8 Just to mention one aspect, the new standard of science implied the use of mathematical models. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Kant claimed that 'in any special doctrine of nature there can be – in fact – only as much *proper* science as there is *mathematics* therein' ([1786] 1968: 470).
- 9 See, for example, Rosenberg (2014: 42): 'The humanities ... need naturalism to show how interpretation is grounded in science.'
- 10 Quine could also fit into this latter position, as he is seen as advocating the idea that philosophy is part of science but deals with the more abstract, theoretical aspects of

- it (see Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 26–27). Unsurprisingly, there is an array of views about the relationship between philosophy and science. For a useful reconstruction, see Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood (2013: 24–69).
- 11 The following are just some of the methods and approaches available in contemporary philosophy: conceptual analysis, Critical Theory, experimental philosophy, hermeneutical methodology, naturalistic methodology, phenomenology, pragmatism, deconstructionist methodology and linguistic therapy (D'Oro and Overgaard 2017). In general, the problems we have mentioned concerning the individuation of both the objects and methods of philosophy are part of the reason why essentialist definitions of philosophy, which seek an 'x' underlying everything understood as 'philosophy', present significant theoretical difficulties. Both methodological and topical definitions of philosophy cannot be exhaustive or precise, ranging from too circumscribed to too general (see Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 20–22).
 - 12 See Knobe and Nichols (2008, 2014).
 - 13 See Prinz (2008).
 - 14 Note that experimental philosophers also reject an exceptionalist conception of philosophy, as it would not represent any privileged stance in the understanding of concepts (see Knobe and Nichols 2008).

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Part One

Hegel's Metaphilosophy

Hegel's Metaphilosophical Project

Konrad Utz

Hegel is very affirmative about what today is called metaphilosophy: philosophy must clarify its own concepts, including the concept of itself, its object, method and aim. Philosophy is *essentially* about itself, it is essentially self-referential. Hegel's metaphilosophy is a direct consequence of the self-referentiality he attributes to knowledge as such. Knowledge in the strict sense must be self-referential because this is the only way *truth* can be *certain*. Only when the known and the knower are identical is truth guaranteed, and thus knowledge is established. Of course, this means that Hegel understood the concept of knowledge in a very strong sense – like René Descartes – and recognized that certainty must be complete, but he believed it is only possible in the case of self-knowledge – again, like Descartes.

However, unlike Descartes, self-affirmation is not enough, according to Hegel. To have self-knowledge the self must know something *about* itself – and to have full self-knowledge, it must, in a certain sense, know all about itself. This something must be discursively articulated, it must be clear and distinct – it cannot be just some vague notion the self has about itself. Otherwise, it would not be really knowledge. For instance, it is not really knowledge if I 'know' that Peter is an osteopath, but I don't really know what an osteopath is.

Of course, the Cartesian self does not only affirm its own existence, this self is also qualified as a 'thinking substance'. But Descartes fails to specify the concept of thought. However, without knowing what thought is, knowledge of oneself as a thinking substance is not really knowledge in the full sense.¹ It is like knowing that Peter is an osteopath, knowing only that osteopaths have something to do with bones.

More precisely, Hegel follows Kant in his distinction between certainty and knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Kantian transcendental self-consciousness is absolutely certain about itself (as Descartes already said, in different terminology). However, this certainty, conforming to Kant, only concerns its own existence. Since existence is no real predicate, transcendental self-consciousness does not know anything *about* itself.² 'Knowledge', conforming to Kant, always is predicative in this sense, and Hegel agrees. This, by the way, clarifies the Kantian and Hegelian concept of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*):³ it is certainty plus predicative, discursively articulated content. Certainty is not the same as justification, it implies truth *in the case of predicative, discursively articulated*

propositions (objective certainty implies truth objectively, subjective certainty implies the subjective conviction of truth). However, there can be certainty without truth in the case of non-predicative propositions, as in 'I exist.' That is, 'truth' stands not only for a formal aspect of knowledge but also for a material aspect: where there is truth, there is some predicative content. Therefore, the formula for knowledge is certainty plus truth, understanding that there can not only be truth without certainty, but in the case of I-exist-consciousness, also certainty without truth. Therefore, the formula is not a pleonasm.

Thus, we could say that certainty is the easy part of knowledge, since it can be guaranteed by self-referentiality: every existential self-consciousness (in the sense of I-exist-consciousness) is absolutely certain, subjectively and objectively. The difficult part is predicative content, and the really difficult part is how to introduce predicative content without losing the certainty of epistemic self-reference. Common sense will say that this is impossible. Either we have pure, contentless self-consciousness or we have consciousness about something different from ourselves (in the strict sense; in this strict sense, knowledge about our body, for example, already is knowledge about something different from the pure, abstract self, which is directly conscious of itself in pure self-consciousness). In the latter case we cannot have the certainty of the former. Reaching out beyond abstract self-consciousness is reaching out beyond the realm of absolute certainty – so it seems (and so it seemed to Kant).

This is where Hegel disagrees. Predicative content may be introduced into the circle of self-certainty. More exactly, it cannot be introduced *from outside*, but it can *originate* within that circle. More exactly still: it *must* originate within it, since epistemic self-reference according to Hegel cannot be direct (i.e. intuitive): it must be mediated by difference, by negation.⁴ This means, on the one hand, that the certainty of epistemic self-reference may (and necessarily will) extend to predicative content. On the other hand, epistemic predicative content may be (and necessarily will be, in the last instance) self-referential, namely knowledge (in the full sense) may be and ultimately will be about itself, it will clarify and explain itself. The project of knowledge as a systematic whole, which is the project of science (as a whole, including philosophy), comprises its metatheory.⁵

Figuratively speaking, the immediate, intuitive self-certainty of abstract self-consciousness that we may think of as a single point should expand into a circle. Within this circle, there is 'room' for discursive predicative content. With this, epistemic self-reference is not just something given in itself and for itself, it turns out to be an 'element' or 'ether'⁶ or (as seems to be more appropriate in today's English) a *medium* in which content may exist, like sound waves exist in air. However, different from natural elements or ether or mediums, the space provided by expanded cognitive self-reference continues to be part of this self-reference and of its dynamics. Therefore, whatever exists in this medium, does not exist as a part or a configuration of something only *objectively* given, but as a moment of the dynamics of self-reference, which is that of a *subject*.

Hegel pretends to show that *all* that exists necessarily exists within this medium, namely within the circle of differentiated, dynamic self-reference, because it is only within such a whole that anything can be *something*, specifically, something determinate.

This is what he means by objective or absolute idealism. Therefore, the thesis of this idealism is not only one of (object-)philosophy but also of metaphilosophy.

Hegel's fundamental metaphilosophical thesis implies theses about various specific issues of metaphilosophy, as discussed in current debates. In the following I will try to explain some of the most central issues: metaphilosophy normally is supposed to say something about the *language* philosophy uses, about its relation to *science*, about its own *concept* (i.e. about *what it is*), about its *aim*, its *object* and its *method*. In trying to clarify Hegel's answers to these questions, I will actively follow the principle of charity, that is, I will try to make Hegel's theses as plausible as possible and will restrict myself to some very few critical remarks. It will become apparent that all points except the first are systematically intertwined in Hegel's philosophy. In a certain sense, the answer to all these questions is the same. The key to this answer is the *discursive, dynamic self-reference* I have explained in this section. In this sense, the rest of this chapter tries to show how this basic principle unfolds to answer all the specific metaphilosophical questions stated above. Of course, this should also serve to make this basic principle clearer and more concrete, to give flesh to the bones.

The language of philosophy

Let us start with the most disappointing aspect of Hegel's metaphilosophy, seen from a contemporary perspective: as may be expected from the historical context, language as such has very little importance for Hegel. With regard to the science of philosophy, it is but an instrument. Philosophical concepts do not depend on language in the sense of a symbolic system. They exist *a priori* as 'pure determinations of thought', independently of the names they are given contingently in historic languages.⁷

This means, on the other hand, that not all existing languages have given names to all philosophical concepts. However, those languages used by civilizations that have developed abstract thought normally provide words for most of these concepts, and those few for which they have none may receive names borrowed from foreign languages. Therefore, Hegel sees no need to develop some special, artificial philosophical language.

Philosophy as science

Hegel emphatically states: 'To participate in the collaborative effort at bringing philosophy nearer to the form of science – to bring it nearer to the goal where it can lay aside the title of *love of knowing* and be *actual knowing* – is the task I have set for myself' (PS, 5–6). This is the dream philosophers have dreamt since Descartes, or to put it in a negative form: since it became apparent that the new sciences were much more successful than philosophy, up to the point that the latter lost its legitimacy to the title of science. It is evident from the citation that Hegel thought that the project of turning philosophy into science had not been successful so far – but that there were hopes of concluding it and that he himself aspired to do so.⁸

But what is this 'form of science' or of 'actual knowing' Hegel was seeking for philosophy? Unfortunately, most of what Hegel writes about the concept of science is heavily loaded with his own theory and terminology, in such a way that nobody but a true Hegelian will accept it at face value. This makes Hegel liable to the reproach that he manages to turn philosophy into science simply by redefining the concept of science in a way that fits his specific conception of philosophy.

However, I think that some fundamental conception of science can be distilled from Hegel's rather ornate explanations,⁹ which may be acceptable to common sense. To show this, I will not enter into any particular theory of science but will only refer to the most general and common notions about science, to show that what Hegel expresses is, in fact, very close to these.

Hegel seeks to define science neither by its fixed contents, namely the 'results of doing science', as is the traditional view, nor by the practice or practices that scientists follow, as is the more contemporary view. Rather, he parts from the general form of both aspects as they are commonly understood. The general form of the *content* of science is conceptual-discursive-systematic. Science presents its results using concepts that are (more or less) distinct and clear, and which are put together in a systematic way, forming sentences and theories. Of course, mathematical concepts such as numbers and equations are included in this picture. Take, for example, the famous ' $e = m \cdot c^2$ '. Here we have highly abstract conceptions, one of which, energy, is not even directly observable. The meaning of these conceptions only becomes clear when we consider how they are systematically linked to other concepts, including, for example relativistic space-time. The concepts used form an expression that describes a *necessary* and *universal* nexus. Nobody will understand this expression by simply looking at things. Science means *thinking* things, taking things to the sphere of thought, to the sphere of 'spirit', in Hegel's terminology. Understanding science is understanding that you are not doing science until you take whatever knowledge you have to this sphere, the sphere of the *conceptual*, *discursive* and *inferentially connected*, which at the same time, is the sphere of the *universal*, *necessary* and *systematically organized*.

Kant had argued that *all of this* stems from the spontaneity of the subject in the process of knowing, since raw sense data have *nothing of this*, and Hegel follows him here.¹⁰ Therefore, for Hegel, acknowledging the superiority of science over other forms of knowledge already means, implicitly, acknowledging idealism, at least in some form. But even if we do not want to accept the latter thesis, we may, perhaps, concede that the high demands of science have something to do with the high demands human spirit has developed for itself over the centuries and that these are not something just naturally given. If we understand nature scientifically, we do not understand it as it 'naturally' or directly presents itself, but as spirit demands it to be presented.

If we look at modern scientific *practice*, again under its formal aspect, and again in a very abstract and general way, we observe that the natural scientist, equipped with some theoretical conception or other (like a general background theory and a specific hypothesis, for example) is going from her sphere of conceptual, discursive and systematic thought all the way down to the particular, non-discursive and isolated sense experience, typically expressed in the form of a measurement. She then takes the data she collected all the way up again to integrate it in some way or other into

the systematic whole on the conceptual level, with its characteristics of necessity and universality.¹¹ Of course, the integration may be negative in the sense that some data falsifies a theory. In this case, the process of 'spiritualization' is, in a certain sense, even more obvious: some isolated, contingent, limited sense data gains the power of refuting a whole theory and thus of stating *universally* and *necessarily*: 'this theory is wrong'.

Thus, the practice of science can be seen as spirit reaching out from its own sphere to that which is not spirit, namely that which is opposed to its sphere, then taking back what it got out there to the sphere of thought and integrating it to what it got in there – that is, integrating it to itself, to its own knowledge by its own standards, as described above. If spirit is successful in this, it can be said that it has found that which is 'its own' and thus is, in the last instance, which it is 'itself', specifically, that it has discerned the conceptual within that which was its 'other' or 'otherness': for example, it has found mathematical relations 'within' observational data. Therefore, when doing natural science, spirit discerns the 'spiritual' (concepts, logic, mathematics) within the empirical.¹² With this explanation in mind, Hegel's own words perhaps do not sound as strange as they do at first sight: 'Pure self-knowing in absolute otherness, this ether *as such*, is the very ground and soil of science, or, *knowing in its universality*' (PS, 16).

If we describe the formal aspect of doing science on the level of abstraction of this latter citation, it remains unspecified what the 'absolute otherness' of self-knowing is. In natural science, it is empirical content as opposed to mathematic models. However, the 'absolute otherness' may be something else in other sciences. In Hegel's *Science of Logic*, for example, the starting point is 'pure being', and the 'absolute otherness' from this is 'pure nothing' – which evidently, is not something empirical. In contemporary English (different from German, for example) the term 'science' has been reserved for empirical science, so not even mathematics is 'science'. Hegel's concept of science, of course, is broader (as was the traditional concept, still in use in German and other languages), but as shown, the difference is just 'one level of abstraction'.

If we see it like this, Hegel's reproach concerning the state of philosophy in his own time is not that it falls short of an epistemic standard contingently established by some special science or sciences, like the natural sciences, but that it falls short of the demands spirit itself has set for knowledge – and of which modern natural sciences are but one illustrating example. This makes the challenge to turn philosophy into science all the more urgent.

However, philosophy will have to meet the standards of science in its own way, not in the way of the natural sciences. Not unlike Plato, Hegel saw the use of quantification and of mathematical models as a mark of 'lesser sciences' that approach their objects from the outside and do not get to their core.¹³ Quantitative sciences only give understanding, not comprehension, to use a famous Hegelian terminological distinction.¹⁴ To *comprehend* reality, science must deal with concepts. Therefore, the highest, ultimate science, which is philosophy, must define and clarify concepts – including, in the last instance, the concept of itself. However, the standards explained above remain valid: scientific philosophical investigation must be *conceptual*, *discursive* and *inferential*, it must explain concepts as *necessary* and *universal* determinations of thought that form a *systematic whole*. Spirit can only practice this science by stepping out of its circle of (immediate, direct) self-reference and relating itself to its Other,

namely to that which it is not, whatever this may be. Then it must integrate this Other into the circle of self-reference, enriching, widening and clarifying this circle and thus its self-knowledge. If spirit is successful in doing this, it will comprehend that which was its Other as, in fact, belonging to itself: as being, in essence, logically and conceptually constituted. As such, the former Other then takes part of the dynamics of the circle of spirit's self-reference and, thus, its self-knowledge.

Two theses follow from this. The first thesis is that all that exists is to be known as being *relational*, as being part of a systematic whole and as having all its particular determinations in virtue of this systematic whole. The concept of energy, for example, has no meaning *outside* the inferential relations the formulae of physics provide. However, this means that something can have energy only with reference to these relations. Therefore, *to be is to be referential*. The second thesis is that all referentiality must, in the last instance, be part of or be a moment of (dynamic) self-referentiality. Otherwise, we would end up with an infinite regress of referential determination or with an implosion of the whole of relations, which after all, consist in nothing because all is determined only with reference to something else, which in turn is only determined with reference to something else, which in turn is only determined with reference to something else and so on, so that, taken all together, nothing is determined at all. There must be something that is determined in itself, *without* reference to something else. However, this something cannot be non-referential because without referentiality there can be no determination at all. Therefore, something can be determined in itself only *by way of self-reference*, specifically, in the ultimate instance *as a subject*. All other determination and hence all other determinate entities can only subsist within the dynamics of self-reference of this subject.

These two theses together form the thesis of *objective idealism*. Note that the fundamental self-referentiality in this conception is not necessarily that of a finite subject like you and me – in fact, it *cannot* be such a subject, as we will see shortly. The thesis is that of *objective* idealism, of everything taking part of the internal dynamics of *some objectively given* self-referential structure which has the form of subjectivity – not of *subjective* idealism, namely, of everything taking place in *my* subjective consciousness.

With this, philosophy *should be* as certain and true as any other science. In fact, it should be more so than any other science. For all philosophical knowledge should, ultimately, be self-knowledge (not *my* self-knowledge, but self-knowledge of *some* self), specifically, it should be part of the discursive articulation of epistemic self-reference. However, since this self-reference guarantees absolute truth and certainty (because the object and subject of knowledge are absolutely identical), this truth and certainty should also apply to the conceptual articulation of the circle. Philosophy should be – objectively – 'absolute science' (SL, 36).

However, this absolute truth and certainty of scientific philosophy *as such* does not mean that the individual human philosopher (like Hegel himself) is infallible. The subject who knows herself/himself in the circles of philosophical knowledge is not identical with any finite, human subject. That subject is *absolute spirit*. When a human subject does philosophy, he/she participates in the self-knowledge of absolute spirit. However, since any human subject is finite, he/she will never be able to identify

completely with the self of this self-knowledge. Hence, only philosophy *as such* is absolutely true and certain, no human philosopher is in possession of absolute truth and certainty. Obviously, Hegel himself made no such claim, he expressively stated that his work was imperfect.¹⁵

Of course, it is only by way of this distinction between finite subjects like you and me and the absolute subject that Hegel can defend his conception of absolute truth and certainty and, hence, of *absolute science* without making a completely absurd claim. However, this seems to diminish the plausibility of this conception. The strength of Descartes's argument was that *I* am absolutely certain of *my* existence whenever *I* am explicitly self-conscious. However, this subjective evidence vanishes completely if I try to transfer it to some subject different from me. Of course, it still is evident to me that *another* subject *should be* absolutely certain of *her/his* existence whenever *she/he* is explicitly self-conscious. But I have no evidence *of the same sort* that there *is, in fact*, another subject, let alone an absolute subject. Of course, Hegel thinks he can show the *necessity* of the existence of such an absolute subject (in the form of absolute idea and absolute spirit). However, once again, this necessity is not evident *in the same way* as the necessity of my own existence, whenever I think about it.

On the other hand, Hegel's conception is not a *completely implausible* one. It seems plausible that a subject – like you and me – should, in principle, be able to conceptually clarify its own epistemic self-reference: to clarify what 'reference', 'self', 'subject', 'knowledge', 'truth', 'certainty', 'thought', 'existence', etc., really mean. It should, in principle, be possible not only to have vague, inarticulate self-consciousness but also to *know* oneself in the sense described above. However, if this is possible, it is, in principle, conceivable to complete the project of self-knowledge – specifically, complete self-knowledge – although no finite subject will be capable of it. The *idea* of such complete self-knowledge is the *absolute idea* of the *Science of Logic*.¹⁶ Conforming to Hegel, this idea, as such, *already has* existence *as an idea* – like, say, the number pi has 'existence' as a mathematical entity even though no mathematician has complete knowledge of it. Of course, for a realist, different from an idealist like Hegel, the existence of something *as an idea* does not carry much weight, ontologically speaking. But perhaps such an idea may serve at least a *function*: the function of establishing the standards of science as an *ideal*. Of course, Hegel would not be content with this reduced version of his grand theory, but perhaps it is one way of making sense of his conception of an absolute subject for those who are not convinced of his absolute idealism.

The concept of philosophy

Since philosophy has turned into science (Hegel was confident that he had succeeded in his project, cf. the titles he gave to his major works), its traditional name is inadequate. However, it would have been extravagant to change this name, so Hegel kept it. But the *concept* this name stands for was not 'love for wisdom' or 'love of knowledge' (as Hegel translates) anymore. "This concept of philosophy is the self-thinking Idea, the knowing truth (§236), the logical with the meaning that it is the universality verified

in the concrete content as in its actuality' (EPM, §574).¹⁷ In §236 we read: 'The idea as the unity of the subjective and the objective idea is the concept of the idea, for which the idea as such is the object (*Gegenstand*) ... an object (*Objekt*) into which all determinations have gone together. This unity is accordingly the *absolute and entire truth*, the idea thinking itself' (EL, §236). That is, the concept of philosophy really is a or, better, philosophy itself is *the* completely self-referential concept, the concept that conceives itself. However, as stated above, this conceiving is not intuitive (in the technical sense) and, as such, inarticulate, but discursive. It makes itself explicit by means of those determinations that have been 'gone together into' this idea. It is nothing new that concepts may unite other concepts within themselves. The concept of 'Pegasus' unites 'within itself' the concept of 'horse' and 'winged being'. However, this unity is contingent and external, it represents a mere conceptual aggregate. In contrast to this, the 'determinations' or concepts that 'go together into' the concept of the absolute idea evolve necessarily one out of the other and form a systematic whole (see the section 'The method of philosophy' below about this). Thus, the absolute idea is not just a concept of an aggregate, namely of an external composition, but of a necessary, systematic unity that is self-referential. Therefore, this idea is a *subject* in the sense that it is self-conceiving and self-comprehending.

This, of course, seems strange not only to the common mind but also to the non-Hegelian philosopher. For Hegel, subjectivity is, in the first place, a logical structure. It is – in the *first* place – not something like you and me. You and I are subjects only because we instantiate this structure of conceptual self-reference. We do this in space and time – not in the realm of pure logic or 'pure thought' – and we do it in an imperfect way. Hence, we are *finite* subjects. The absolute subject is a 'logical reality', a concept which is self-referential in the sense that it instantiates itself and comprehends itself. This is what its name, 'absolute idea', is supposed to mean. Hence, the absolute idea is not a subject in addition to logic, it is not somebody who thinks the thoughts of logic. It is not, for example, a god who, in his divine mind, has all the logical concepts as its content. The subject of logic is not outside logic, it is nothing but the self-referential structure of logic itself. Logic is its own subject. The whole of logic essentially is subjectivity. This view certainly is uncommon – and I personally do not agree with it. However, at first glance, it is not so clear why it should be wrong. Why should subjectivity be something different from a logical structure? What is it that subjects like you and me have which a pure logical structure cannot have – and which prevents such a structure from being a subject? Since it is unclear what the answers to these questions could be,¹⁸ it is unclear that Hegel's conception of subjectivity is wrong.

The *concepts* the absolute idea unites within itself are, in the first instance, the *logical* concepts as such, as they are developed in the *Science of Logic*.¹⁹ Of course, this science must also clarify the concept of concept itself, as the concepts of judgement and inference, of subjectivity and objectivity, of idea and of knowing.

In the second instance, the *philosophy of Nature* and the *philosophy of Spirit* show how these concepts are 'confirmed' or how they 'prove valid' in comprehending nature and spirit. Therefore, in the end, those concepts by which the absolute idea conceives and comprehends itself prove to be the fundamental concepts of all reality. All reality must

be conceived as being part of the immensely complex dynamics of self-reference of the absolute idea. This is why this idea is not only 'absolute truth' – the complete identity of intellect and object (*intellectus et rei*), of concept and object or of subject and object. It is also the 'entire truth' because it comprises all other philosophical concepts, together with their systematic relations to one another (and thus, together with the propositions they form), which in turn are the basis of all reality. The concept of philosophy is the concept of this idea. The conception of *spirit* that fully comprehends the totality of reality as confirming the absolute idea is 'absolute spirit'.²⁰ Absolute spirit comprehends all reality as logically structured and hence as having the structure of subject-like (i.e. of 'subjectual') self-referentiality, in which the apparently non-referential is only a moment. Thus, absolute spirit also comprehends *itself* as having this structure – in fact, it is nothing but this comprehension of having or of realizing the structure of the absolute idea *in space and time*. Again, absolute spirit is not an 'additional person' who populates reality, it is nothing but the (complete, perfect) realization of the logical structure of subjectivity in space and time.

The aim of philosophy

The aim of philosophy is truth.²¹ In a certain sense, it also is its object. The latter is easy to explain: if philosophy is, essentially, self-knowledge, then it has the *form* of 'absolute knowing' in the sense that subject/intellection and object are identical, as explained above. However, since this self-knowledge must be clear and distinct, it should clarify not only its object-aspect and its subject/intellection-aspect but also the relation of both: their identity. However, since the concept of this relation is the concept of truth (identity of object and intellection), conceptually clarified self-knowledge necessarily implies the clarification of the concept of truth. Of course, in the last instance, this clarification will be a clarification *about itself*, since, as seen in the previous paragraph, the absolute idea *is truth* and is *all truth*. It is not only true, truth is not only its predicate, but its essence.

The first point is not so easy to explain. In fact, it seems that truth as the goal of philosophy is the one *necessary presupposition* that Hegel does not justify *beforehand*. In some of his prefaces and introductions he argues against the various reasons that have kept people from seeking the truth, like undue humility, self-conceit or laziness.²² But these are evidently arguments *ad hominem*, not dialectical demonstrations as Hegelian philosophical science requires.

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel explains how the 'Trieb der Wahrheit', the '*impulse of truth*' (SL, 697), dialectically evolves out of the concept of the idea. Roughly speaking, the ultimate self-referentiality (within which everything else is but a moment) must be conceived of as dynamic. This dynamic, in turn, must be conceived of as *epistemic* and as *practical*. Regarding the *epistemic* aspect, the explication of the moving or motivating principle of this dynamic is the 'idea of the true' (SL, 697). That is, truth is that which all epistemic self-referentiality inherently seeks. If I am self-conscious, if I self-consciously affirm myself, the underlying moving principle of that act is the 'idea of the true': I cannot (even) be self-conscious without, implicitly, adhering to

this principle. However, since self-consciousness seems to be, on the one hand, the most undemanding form of affirmation and, on the other hand, the most certain one, there is no more basic motivational principle than truth with regard to epistemic self-referentiality and, with this, with regard to knowing in general.²³

With regard to the *practical* aspect, the underlying universal motivating principle is the 'idea of the good' (SL, 729), which roughly speaking, is the same as that of the true, only the direction of fit is inverted. The absolute idea is the identity of the theoretical and the practical idea, of truth and good, the 'symmetrical fit' of the subjective and objective, of concept and object, as being strictly identical (SL, 735). Thus, truth (now conceived of as identity of the true and the good) is the motivating principle inherent in the dynamics of the self-reference (i.e. of the 'life', cf. SL, 735) of the absolute idea. This idea is '*self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*', as already cited. With this, truth in the ultimate sense *is* the absolute idea, as the inherent aim this idea has completed and is constantly, infinitely completing in its act of self-knowledge. However, truth is the absolute idea *as* motivating itself, truth expresses the (self)-motivational aspect of the absolute idea. Thus, it is the adequate conception of the motivation or aim of philosophy.

However, with this, truth is taken as a self-evident aim, as an aim that is evident in the self-evidence of self-knowledge, as the motivation of this knowledge. There is no *positive* justification of the goal of truth beyond this evidence, since this evidence is basic in the strongest possible sense. The only possible justification is negative: showing that those philosophers who do *not* seek truth are motivated by some evidently inadequate principle such as (undue) humility, self-conceit or laziness. With this, the *objective of truth* is the one basic primary evidence from which Hegel's whole philosophical project starts, the one presupposition that should be evident to all but cannot be proven and should not be questioned any more. 'There is no excuse needed for this attempt [of philosophy to strive to rise up to that goal]' (SL, 508).

The object of philosophy

As already said, in a certain sense, truth is the object of philosophy.²⁴ However, this object is not different from the absolute idea, which in turn, is the concept of philosophy: philosophical knowledge is self-referential, philosophy is its own supreme object which the absolute idea represents in itself, that is, within its articulate self-reference, a relation of identity of concept and object, of intellection and intellected. Since the concept of philosophy is the 'idea which thinks itself', this absolute idea is 'the sole subject matter and content of philosophy' (SL, 735). However, since the self-knowing of the absolute idea articulates itself through a whole system of concepts and manifests itself in spatiotemporal reality in different figurations (of which the two basic ones are nature and spirit), these concepts and figurations (*Gestaltungen*) also are the object of philosophy. More precisely, 'the business of philosophy is to recognize it [the absolute idea] in these' (SL, 735).

The method of philosophy

Like the object of philosophy, its method also must be identical with itself *qua* concept, namely with the absolute idea. The method of philosophy must be the 'way of proceeding' or the 'way of moving' of that absolute idea itself, where its motion is not different from itself. This is not as strange as it may seem at first sight, if we remember that even in Descartes the *act* of thinking 'I am' constitutes exactly that reality which makes that thought true. Hegel just takes this insight in the strictest possible sense: there is no fixed, immobile substance *behind* this act which subsists independently of this act and which is the author of this act. The absolute idea is strictly identical with its act of discursive self-comprehension. The permanence of its truth is not due to an eternal substance that carries out this act, but to the logical (i.e. non-temporal) nature of this act together with the fact that as a *purely logical (dynamical) structure*, this act has neither beginning nor end. The act or motion of the absolute idea forms a circle not only in the sense that it begins where it ends but also in the sense that it has no beginning or end *outside itself* (e.g. some point of time when somebody began this circular motion) and that its *own, internal* ending (its self-completion) is identical with its beginning (its self-constitution) and vice versa.

Therefore, in one sense, the method of Hegel's philosophy is just the whole dynamics of the absolute idea (in the absolute spirit), that is, the development of his philosophy as a whole. However, there necessarily also is an explicit comprehension of what this development is in its *essence*. This is explained – naturally – in the chapter about the absolute idea – since this method is nothing but the general structure of the dynamics of this idea. The method of philosophy in this specific sense is the method of speculative dialectics, famed by many and despised by many others. I will try to give a short, very comprehensive outline of it, without entering into any of the manifold debates that circle around it.²⁵

Hegel's method starts with something immediately or originally given, something given 'before anything else' or given before entering into contact with anything else. The idea behind this is that we should and, in the last instance, inevitably will begin at the beginning. But the beginning is just that which does not come after something else, which does not follow from something else and, thus, is not mediated by something else. Of course, we can *take* something as the beginning that, *in fact*, is not immediate in this sense. However, if we do this, our beginning is, in a certain sense, inconsistent: we *take* something as a beginning that, as we are well aware, *is not* a beginning, is not something 'first' and immediate. For sure, all specific sciences commit this 'inconsistency', and they are justified in this, since they do not take themselves to be first sciences: they make no claim to start 'right from the beginning'. But philosophy, as the first science, has the duty to go back to the *very beginning*, which must be immediate or else it is not the very beginning.

Hegel's point is that the beginning, the first immediate, will show itself to be deficient, to be in need of mediation, to be instable and even (in a certain sense) impossible all by itself. However, this does not mean that we should begin with something else than the beginning, with something different from the purely immediate. If we do this, we

simply give up the project of science (science in the strong sense as explained above). If we stick to this project, we must begin at the beginning *and then see what happens* – what is the consequence of the failure of the beginning, the failure of the immediate?

In the sphere of pure thought (the sphere of Logic in Hegel's sense), the beginning, the purely immediate is pure, empty and indistinct thought, thought that did not yet have any 'contact' with something and that, hence, is without any content and distinction. Hegel identifies this immediate, original thought with the thought of pure being. If we are thinking what, in normal language, is called 'pure being', we think a thought that is devoid of any specific content, which is completely abstract and without distinction.²⁶

The next methodological step is to negate this first conception. In Hegel's view, negation of a concept produces the 'opposite' of that concept, what nowadays is also called its 'complementary concept'. For example, the negation of 'pure being' produces 'pure nothing', the negation of 'identity' produces 'difference' and so forth.²⁷ Of course, this only works with philosophical concepts (first of all logical concepts, then philosophical concepts of nature and spirit). There is no opposite of the concept of hedgehog, for example.

The reason why it is necessary to negate the first conception is its conceptual instability *as a purely immediate conception*. It remains indistinct as long as it does not relate negatively to something that it is not. Pure being, for example, does not mean anything and does not constitute anything if there is nothing from which it is different. But this means that pure being, all by itself, is nothing at all. However, nothing at all or 'pure nothing' is exactly the opposite or the conceptual complement of pure being. The instability or deficiency of the first, immediate conception 'automatically' produces its own conceptual negation.

However, according to Hegel, the new situation is not much better either. Now, we have got difference, but this difference, as such, is indistinct. The two conceptions are opposed to one another, they exclude one another. But their whole determination consists *only* in this abstract, formal relation. This means, *by themselves*, they differ in nothing, there is no *content* by which they are different. Take the example of pure being and pure nothing: there is nothing *in which* pure being differs from pure nothing, on the purely conceptual level.

In a more abstract sense, the problem is that both conceptions *exclude* one another on the one hand, but on the other hand, they exist only *in virtue of* one another, since they are nothing *without* their *relation of mutual exclusion*. However, this means that, in fact, each of the opposing conceptions, taken in itself, *includes* its relation to the other and, hence, to that other conception because this relation constitutes what it is itself. Therefore, the result of the first negation is a situation of inconsistency or of 'contradiction': two are, at the same time, distinct and indistinct from one another, they exclude and include one another at the same time.

Formally speaking, the problem is that two cannot be distinct by something that is, itself, indistinct. But the first negation or *simple oppositional relation, taken by itself*, is not distinct from anything else – as the *first conception*, in the beginning, was indistinct from anything else. If that relation should carry out the task to guarantee the distinctness of the two opposing conceptions, it must be, in its turn, a *distinct*

conception. However, to be such a conception, this relation must, in turn, be distinct from something, it must be opposed to something or must have negative relation to something else. For it is only in virtue of such distinctive relation that anything can be something.

Therefore, the very relation of the first two conceptions – their opposition or ‘first negation’ – must be distinguished. That is, the *inconsistency* which results from the first negation calls for a *second negation*. This call for negation is what we know from one of the most basic logical evidences, the evidence of non-contradiction: whatever is contradictory, *cannot* be the case or *cannot* be true. Hence, the second negation is not the negation of the second *conception*. Such negation would only take us back to the first conception: negating pure nothing produces pure being again. This would be double negation in the formal or mathematical sense, where minus times minus makes plus. In Hegel's dialectics, the second negation is negation of the (negative, mutually excluding) *relation* between the first two conceptions. Hence, for example, in the case of ‘pure being – pure nothing’, the second negation produces the conception of that relation which *includes* being and nothing in one unity – in contrast to that relation which *excludes* them from one another as two different unities. This conception is the concept of *becoming*: if we think (i.e. if we actualize in our thought) that conception which, in normal English, is called ‘becoming’, we think an *inclusive* unity of being and nothing, a dynamic unity of a *transition* of one to the other. Now we have arrived at a conception by which we can think being and nothing at ‘*the same time*’, within the same concept without producing inconsistency.²⁸

At the same time, this new conception is implicitly metatheoretical (or, as yet, meta-conceptual) with regard to the previous ‘theory’ or thought. Becoming, namely passing from being to nothing and vice versa, is what, *in fact*, happened before the second negation, on the object level: unstable pure being passed into pure nothing, and indistinct nothing (nothing which negates nothing) passed into pure being. The second negation *reflects* what was going on in the first negation. To put it in colloquial terms, we could tell the philosopher who, in her mind, tries to put the first negation into effect, arriving from pure being at pure nothing: ‘Just think about what happened in your mind. Try to form a conception of what took place as a pure, logical act; i.e. abstracting from yourself as the subject who enacted this act.’ This conception is ‘becoming’.²⁹

Hegel's project of Science of Logic is to continue with this sort of self-clarification of pure thought until thought is completely transparent and conceptually clear to itself. To do this, the first methodological performance of *immediately given*, *first negation* and *second negation* must be followed by other performances that formally follow the same dialectical method but are different in content. For this, the result of one step, which regarding that step, represents the *metatheoretical* conception of what was going on in the first negation, must be taken again on the *object*-theoretical level. Hegel thinks that this happens automatically: whenever a new metatheoretical conception arises, this conception can be the *object* of another reflection. However, on that level where this conception is taken only as an object and not as a metatheoretical result, this object-conception is, again, *immediately given* and thus lacks the relational distinction which should guarantee its identity. Therefore, the process starts anew.

Of course, with this, the question arises: how can this process ever stop? The answer is: when the former metatheoretical result is taken as an object and thus, again, as something immediately given, the process, as a whole, does not simply fall back to where it started. The new 'immediate conception' is not 'just as bad' or just as indistinct as the first one was. The methodological process has, in fact, produced distinction, and this distinction is 'saved' or 'preserved' within that conception that becomes the starting point of the new methodological step. However, this internal distinction is yet (i.e. in all the methodological steps but the last) insufficient to make the concept in question *conceptually autonomous*, specifically, independent from other concepts outside itself. Hence it is in need of *external* distinction, and thus the process of negation and double negation starts again. To reach that autonomy, a concept must comprise its own concept: when *all it is* is defined within this very concept – when this concept defines itself, containing all that its own definition needs as conceptual moments of itself – then this concept is autonomous. It will not be in need of any external distinction any more. Therefore, the dialectical process will stop when the concept in question has been enriched in such a way that it is (a) fully self-referential and (b) this self-referentiality is fully clear and distinct: it is articulated by a system of concepts which are moments of that very self-referential concept. This concept is Hegel's Absolute idea (that is, 'absolute idea' is the name that he gives to that logical concept, which at least in the sphere of Logic, is complete, consistent and has no need of developing further; in the subsequent spheres of Hegel's philosophy – in philosophy of Nature and of Spirit – the final idea is absolute spirit or, more exactly, the absolute idea in or realized by absolute spirit).

Let us recapitulate the internal logic of this method, trying to make it plausible by recourse to some external evidence that Hegel does not use. Let us start with the evidence that there is no entity without identity and that there is no identity without relation. Of course, this evidence may be questioned, but it seems like a starting point that has a lot of plausibility for many people and, thus, may carry perhaps not a proof, but at least an argument. The latter part of the evidence may be seen as expressed in Leibniz's principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles or in Spinoza's principle of *omnis determinatio est negatio*. To have identity, something must be different from anything else by at least one determination. That is, all that is has a specific negative relation to every other entity. (Thus, being without relation would only be possible if there was only one entity, as in Parmenides. However, this entity would be completely indistinct – it would not be *something*.) This implies, of course that determinations (normally – there may be some exceptions) distinguish entities from one another (or have the potential to do so). If something is blue, for example, it is different from everything that is not blue (in actual reality or possibility).

If there is no identity without relation (without negative relation, to be exact, but this is not decisive for my argument), relations themselves must have identity. Otherwise they would be indistinct (as explained above). If, for example, the relation '... has the same colour as ...' was indistinct from the relation '... has not the same colour as ...', it could not serve to make an entity discernible and, thus, could not help to articulate identity, since an entity having the relation '... has the same colour as ...' to itself would indistinctly have also the relation '... has not the same colour as ...' to itself and

thus nothing could be non-identical with it in virtue of this latter relation. However, this leads to an infinite regress, since the relation required for identity again needs a relation for its own identity and so forth. As already stated above, relation has to start somewhere, otherwise the whole net of relations implodes, however complex it may be. Yet, the starting point cannot be something strictly non-relational, since this would necessarily be completely indiscernible (see above) and, thus, could not contribute to make relations and other entities discernible. Conforming to Hegel, the only solution is *self-reference*. Self-reference seems a suitable *original point of reference* or *original principle* since it requires nothing *besides itself* to have a relation. This should enable self-reference to have identity *by its own* – which is exactly what is required to stop the infinite regress of relations and to prevent the implosion of the holistic totality of relations.

However, if such self-reference is internally indistinct, we end up again with Parmenides. Therefore, as stated at the beginning, distinction must be introduced to self-reference, the self-referent must be distinct to itself, within its relation to itself; and the very relation it has to itself must be distinct to itself. This may seem weird as a theoretical concept, but Hegel points out that each of us, in fact, knows such a thing: each one of us knows herself/himself – not only as pure, indistinct identity but also distinctly as *myself*. Of course, introducing distinction into self-reference in the strict sense will result in some sort of *contradiction* or other. This is what bothers many people about Hegelian dialectics. However, if self-reference is conceived not as something static, but as a dynamic process, this contradiction may eventually be overcome *within* self-reference. The self-referent may comprehend – self-referentially – that the difference it finds in itself is not a difference of itself from itself, but an internal *distinction* of itself, by itself and for itself. Thus, the self-referent self comprehends itself not as the static identity of two that are different (which is contradictory), but as the very *process* of self-identification as being distinct to itself.

However, this means that this self must refer to itself not only *objectively*, since this results in the simple contradiction indicated: either this self is completely indistinct for itself, that is, it is *nothing* for itself, which already is a contradiction; or it is something distinct from itself for itself, that is, it is itself something contradictory for itself. This contradiction only is 'sublated' (*aufgehoben*) if the self changes from the objective perspective on itself to the meta-perspective, where it looks on *what it is doing* when it is conceiving of itself in this contradictory way: it is introducing *by* itself a distinction *into* itself. Thus, it comprehends itself as having the power to introduce distinction, even to induce contradiction. However, with this, this contradiction loses its stability or stable validity. It is just the way self-referent distinction or negation presents itself on the objective or objectual level – much like the Liar Paradox appears in natural languages. In the meta-perspective, this contradictory distinction is not something given, but something that *has been done*: the Self has introduced distinction into itself, by itself. The objectual contradiction is but the vestige of the self-referential act of the Self. However, the importance of this contradiction is that it forces the Self to leave the object level and to 'sublate' (*aufheben*) itself to the meta-level. To speak metaphorically, the contradiction on the object level forces the Self to ask: 'What have I done there!?' The answer to this question will be a new conception of itself, as

introducing distinction into itself by itself *and thus knowing itself* as the 'enactor' of this act of self-determination. Thus, in the result, it is not the case that the Self *is* different from itself, but that it has introduced difference into itself and that it is the Self *of this act* – not the Self, which within this act, appears as being opposed to itself. *In a certain sense*, it also is this latter self, but only 'in passing', as a moment of its discursive act of self-comprehension, as a necessary, momentary conception it necessarily overcomes.³⁰

Conclusion

To summarize, according to Hegel, determinate identity inherently demands for self-reference, and the articulation of self-reference demands for a theory that is inherently metatheoretical. This theory is philosophy as a systematic science. Nothing can be determinate, specifically, nothing can have identity in the Leibnizian sense without referentiality. But referentiality must have some fixed point of reference, otherwise it will implode into indistinctness. Since this point of reference, in its turn, cannot be irreferential, the only solution is that it should be *self-referential*. That is, the referentiality which is needed to establish determinate identity must be comprehended as an aspect of self-referentiality. This means, on the other hand, that there must be such self-referentiality that is not just immediately given (like, eventually, intuitive self-consciousness) but also that discursively articulates itself, which differentiates itself within itself, for itself. The conception of this dynamic, subject-like, self-knowing and self-activating self-reference Hegel calls 'absolute idea'. It is metatheoretical in the precise sense that it comprises not only a (systematic, inferentially articulated) theory about itself as an object but also a metatheory about itself doing this first theory. And both, namely both activities are identical to one another *and* to the discursive act of self-reference of the absolute idea, which is all it consists in.

Notes

- 1 This is why the first part of Hegel's philosophy, the *Science of Logic*, is about thought, about its nature, its concepts, its structure and laws.
- 2 Cf. Kant (1998: 259–260).
- 3 This clarification is only partial, a lot more would have to be said about this, for example, in Kant '*Erkenntnis*' (knowledge) may be false, whereas '*Wissen*' (also translated as 'knowledge') may not. In Hegel it is the other way round. However, this is not important for our purposes.
- 4 The argument is, roughly speaking, that even the most abstract self-consciousness implies some underlying difference, like that of subject and object, form and content or act and result. Without this, self-consciousness would implode into *completely* indistinct identity, which literally is nothing at all. However, this very difference must originate from *within* self-consciousness because self-consciousness, by its own evidence, is independent from all external input.
- 5 Cf. EL, §17: 'In this way, philosophy shows itself to be a sphere that circles back into itself and has no beginning in the sense that other sciences do. Hence, its beginning

has a relationship merely to the subject who resolves to philosophize, but not to the science as such. Or, which comes to the same thing, the concept of the science ... must be grasped by the science itself. This is even its sole purpose, activity, and goal, namely to attain the concept of its concept, returning concept of its concept, returning to itself and attaining satisfaction in the process' (the *Encyclopedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation). For further discussion, see Utz (2017).

- 6 Cf. PS, 16–17: 'Pure self-knowing in absolute otherness, this ether *as such*, is the very ground and soil of science, or, *knowing in its universality*. The beginning of philosophy presupposes or demands that consciousness is situated in this element. [...] For its part, science requires that self-consciousness shall have elevated itself into this ether' (the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Pinkard and Baur's translation, 2018).
- 7 For more detail, see, for example, Fischer Cossetin (2006) and Cook (1973).
- 8 This topic covers a vast field of debate amongst Hegel scholars – as do the following topics. In this chapter, I can only trace some general outlines. For more detail, see Fulda (2009) and Utz (2010a).
- 9 Cf., for example, PS, 1622: 'Spirit knowing itself in that way as spirit is *science*. Science is its actuality, and science is the realm it builds for itself in its own proper element.'
- 10 The difference is that, for Hegel, this subject is not the individual subject like you and me, but in the first instance, a purely logical subject in the form of the absolute idea. In the second instance it its absolute spirit (see below). To be exact, Kant's transcendental subject is not *the* individual subject in the sense that the two are identical. The individual subject like you and me is not only transcendental but also empirical. But you and me fully instantiate the transcendental subject and we put into effect its act, the transcendental synthesis. The transcendental subject is no 'transhuman' subject. Hegel's absolute idea, on the other hand, is not something that can be fully instantiated or put into effect by you and me – but only by the absolute spirit.
- 11 Cf., for example, NG, GW10.1, 61: 'It is the goal of scientific quest to elevate [aufheben] that which is known only empirically ... to the concept, i.e., to make it rational and, thus, to integrate it into rational science' (my translation).
- 12 It is in this sense that Hegel states in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*: 'What is rational, is actual; and what is actual, is rational' (PR, 14) (quotations from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* are taken from Knox's translation).
- 13 Cf., for example, SL, 9: 'inasmuch as philosophy is to be science, it cannot borrow its method from a subordinate science, such as mathematics, any more than it can remain satisfied with categorical assurances of inner intuition, or can make use of argumentation based on external reflection' (the *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation).
- 14 Cf. SL, 21–22.
- 15 Cf. SL, 21–22.
- 16 For more detail, see Utz (2010b).
- 17 The *Philosophy of Mind* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (2007).
- 18 In my own opinion, one crucial answer to this question is indexicality, but I will not discuss this here.
- 19 Cf. Schick (1994).

- 20 Cf. EPM, §§553–555, §§572–577.
- 21 On the question of truth in Hegel, see Baum (1983).
- 22 Cf. EL, §12 R.
- 23 Cf. also Jarczyk (1984.)
- 24 Cf. E17, §19, addendum: 'The question is: what is the object of our science? The most simple and comprehensible answer to this question is that the truth is this object.'
- 25 For a more detailed account see Utz (2001) and Utz (2003).
- 26 On the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, see also Iber (1990) and Koch (2000).
- 27 However, the oppositional or complementary relation of concepts is not always as clear as in these two examples. Often it only is comprehensible from the context in question.
- 28 Cf. Koch (1999).
- 29 For a more detailed discussion of the metatheoretical aspect of Hegel's method, see Utz (2018).
- 30 Cf. also Brauer (1995).

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Hegel's Philosophy of Philosophy

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Introduction

Hegel's major claim is that true philosophy provides the complete rational cognition of the absolute. Let us call this Hegel's *completeness claim*. Since by definition the complete cognition of the absolute cannot be cognitively exceeded, true philosophy itself must account for the completeness claim. There are three places in particular where Hegel develops this claim: the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. In what follows, I explore the different ways in which Hegel elucidates the rational, non-circular explication of how to philosophically conceive of the complete comprehension of philosophy itself, namely his philosophy of philosophy, or metaphilosophy.

This chapter sets out in section one by determining Hegel's account of metaphilosophy. Hegel was not familiar with the notion *metaphilosophy*. He was, however, clearly familiar with the systematic scope of metaphilosophy as it is discussed in more recent times – he recognized the importance of questions such as ‘What is philosophy?’, ‘What is the particular object of philosophy?’, ‘Is there a unique philosophical method?’, ‘Is philosophy searching for truth and/or knowledge?’, ‘Does philosophy need to have an adequate understanding of itself and, if so, what does it look like?’, etc. Here I argue that two conceptions of metaphilosophy must be distinguished in Hegel: *phenomenological* and *logical* metaphilosophy. In the following two sections this distinction is developed in more detail. The second section discusses Hegel's first major attempt to meet the metaphilosophical completeness claim. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel shows how the forms of cognition (*Formen des Fürwahrhaltens*) move from rather undeveloped basic cognitive structures towards the fully developed form of ‘absolute knowing’ of (self-)consciousness, which is supposed to provide the phenomenological solution to the completeness claim. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel combines ‘self-fulfilling scepticism’ and ‘history of self-consciousness’ to demonstrate how philosophy as a rational inquiry arrives at this solution. I argue that Hegel's first attempt to account for the completeness claim – *phenomenological* metaphilosophy – fails. The third section provides an analysis of Hegel's conception of *logical* metaphilosophy in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*. It is in the *Logic* where his idea of philosophy

as rational comprehension of reality by means of self-reflexive thought or absolute subjectivity becomes prevalent. Here I discuss the relevant passages from the major logic ('The Absolute Idea', in particular) and the minor logic (especially 'The 'Absolute Spirit'). As we will see, in the *Logic*, Hegel conceives of metaphilosophy or philosophy of philosophy in terms of pure thinking of thinking. In the conclusion I briefly summarize the findings of my interpretation.¹

Metaphilosophy as philosophy of philosophy

Although Hegel is a great admirer of ancient philosophy, he nevertheless dismisses its classical 'title of *love of knowing*' (PS, GW9, 11).² Rather than being a kind of intellectual *philia*, true philosophy is, for Hegel, '*actual knowing*' in 'the form of science' (PS, GW9, 11). The expression '*actual knowing*' should not be conceived as truly grasping the nature of particular objects of philosophical inquiry like the good, identity, soul, the state or essence. Rather, philosophy as '*actual knowing*' is self-knowledge – philosophy knowing itself. Leaving aside for the moment the question of what it could possibly mean that philosophy is itself *knowing* rather than the *science* of knowing and what the knowing subject of '*actual knowing*' might be, it seems obvious that Hegelian philosophy as self-knowledge is a cognitive identity-relation aiming at self-transparency: 'insight into what knowing is' (PS, GW9, 25). Philosophy as '*actual knowing*' strives thus for exhaustive self-comprehension in that it fully conceptualizes what it is. The project of philosophy conceiving of its own nature is what recently has been termed 'metaphilosophy'.³ Hegel was not familiar with the term *metaphilosophy* but he was certainly pursuing the project of metaphilosophy broadly conceived. Metaphilosophy is, for Hegel, philosophy of philosophy, that is the determination of philosophy by philosophical means. The self-determination of philosophy or knowing (thought) is in fact one of the biggest obstacles Hegel saw himself confronted with.

On the face of it, the project of metaphilosophy seems to be self-defeating from the start. For if metaphilosophy is conceived as philosophy of philosophy in terms of philosophy, philosophizing about philosophy₂, i.e. about what counts as philosophy, its method(s) and its nature, then there cannot be any such thing called 'metaphilosophy'. As Hegel sees it, there are no numerically different *kinds* of philosophy such that philosophy₁ would be in a position to reveal something about philosophy₂. Although there are different *appearances* of philosophical theories and doctrines throughout the history of philosophy, doing philosophy of whatever sort is doing the same unique kind of philosophy. Hegel is not denying that there are independent philosophical disciplines such as logic, ethics, metaphysics, etc., though, but he believes that all of them have essentially the same object of philosophical reflection, which is, in the most general sense, *thought* or *truth*. Therefore, metaphilosophy as philosophy₁, uncovering the nature and purpose of philosophy₂, would be a hopeless project since then philosophy₁, too, would need to be made the object of philosophical inquiry by philosophy_x, which in turn would again need to be determined, and so on and so forth. Thus, this type of metaphilosophy would be pointless because it is infinitely regressing.

On Hegel's view there is a promising alternative conception of metaphilosophy. If metaphilosophy is conceived as philosophy of philosophy in the self-relational sense of philosophy philosophizing about itself, then, as he sees it, the infinite regress can be avoided. Philosophy must simply give up the belief in Aristotelian *proté philosophia* or Cartesian *prima philosophia* that are supposed to first lay the foundation of philosophy before philosophy really starts. Hegel takes this to be a 'hypothetical and problematic kind of philosophizing' since 'to want to know before one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic's wise resolution to learn to swim, before he ventured into the water' (EL, §10 R).⁴ But Hegel's alternative conception of philosophy philosophizing about itself looks like wishful thinking since here even more severe problems complicate the situation. If metaphilosophy is philosophy philosophizing about itself, then an introduction to philosophy is impossible. For in this case introducing to philosophy would mean to start from *outside* of philosophy to get *into* philosophy, although the introduction itself would already be philosophical since it is philosophical reflection. But introducing to philosophy by means of philosophy seems illegitimate. On the other hand, if metaphilosophy is philosophy philosophizing about itself from *inside* of philosophy, then philosophy's self-conception seems to be viciously circular because recognizing itself as philosophy already presupposes the understanding and application of the knowledge that is yet to be achieved in metaphilosophy. As a consequence, since a (philosophical) introduction to philosophy from *outside* of philosophy is illicit, and since philosophical self-understanding from *inside* of philosophy is viciously circular, Hegel's *prima facie* promising alternative conception of metaphilosophy seems to be unattainable too.

Hegel was fully aware of this metaphilosophical challenge and made it a major, or even the major, object of philosophical theory formation. There are two systematic places where he explicitly addresses metaphilosophical questions of this kind. The first systematic place is the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), more specifically the 'Preface' and the 'Introduction' as well as its final chapter 'The Absolute Knowing'. The 'Preface' of the *Phenomenology* is the preface not of the book *Phenomenology* but of Hegel's then-envisioned 'system of science' of which the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from 1807 was supposed to be the first part. The 'Introduction' to the *Phenomenology* is one attempt to realize what the 'Preface' announces. It outlines the sceptical method of attaining *Absolute Knowing*, the place where Hegel lays out what he thinks philosophy as 'actual knowing' amounts to. The second systematic place is the *Science of Logic*. In 'The Absolute Idea' of 'The Doctrine of the Concept' Hegel again, although in a different way than in the *Phenomenology*, explicates his metaphilosophy, which he conceives as the self-relational culmination of 'actual knowing' in terms of philosophy of philosophy. Here the systematic difficulty arises from the fact that Hegel gave up the project of the *Phenomenology* by the time he was working on the *Logic*. This is particularly evident in the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), where in the last section titled "The Philosophy" (§§572–577), he gives a sketch of his mature metaphilosophical views. The two respective accounts of metaphilosophy may be called *phenomenological* and *logical* metaphilosophy. I will now discuss them in turn.

Phenomenological metaphilosophy

Phenomenological metaphilosophy may be described as the view that philosophy can obtain its self-conception only by laying out the 'historical' evolution of epistemic claims according to a systematically organized, necessary structure of knowing consciousness. In the course of this evolution consciousness runs through a series of shapes or epistemic claims until it ultimately reaches a fully developed conception of itself in 'Absolute Knowing.' This self-conception is not to be conceived in terms of the individual but as scientific or philosophical self-knowledge. As such phenomenological metaphilosophy is a consequence of Hegel's early intellectual development. In the early 1800s, Hegel's philosophical views changed dramatically. Until 1800, Hegel believed that the human mind is not capable of acquiring knowledge of the absolute or God by philosophical reflection or reason, but only by means of religious faith. Around 1800, he substitutes the systematic status of religion by philosophical metaphysics, and assigns the logic of finite human thought the role of a systematic *introduction* to philosophy or metaphysics. This logic aims to demonstrate internal contradictions that arise naturally from the limitation of finite human thinking to overcome finitude and to achieve knowledge of the infinite or absolute. The method of this logic is the sceptical method of opposition by means of which contradictions are generated to reveal the constraint of the human mind when trying to grasp the infinite. These contradictions are unsolvable to the human mind; they even *disrupt* finite human thought and force us to relinquish it in favour of speculative knowledge of the absolute. In this way, the logic of finite thinking functions as a systematic introduction to metaphysics by sceptically destroying and finally subsuming the conceptual constituents of finite thought.

During this phase Hegel conceived the absolute as (Spinozist) substance. Around 1804, however, he realized that the absolute is not a static object of thought, namely substance, but rather comprises complex logical, self-referential relations that can only be developed in an independent discipline called speculative logic. This is why from this point on, Hegel no longer conceived the absolute just as substance. The absolute rather is absolute subjectivity incorporating self-referential logical structures. He therefore merged logic and metaphysics and made it the new science of the absolute.⁵ This is where metaphilosophy as philosophy of philosophy comes in. For if logic is unified to metaphysics, a systematic introduction to metaphysics is rendered superfluous. But then the question is whether the finite human mind has the capacity to acquire knowledge of the absolute, namely the domain of 'actual knowing.' Hegel believes that a systematic introduction to metaphysics as true philosophy is still required. Access to the domain of 'actual knowing' or metaphysics as true philosophy is provided through the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which now takes on the function of introducing metaphysics as the science of the absolute. It is the *Phenomenology's* task to show how the human mind is capable of acquiring knowledge of the absolute by guiding the human mind from finite thinking to 'absolute knowing' or metaphysics, where philosophy grasps itself in terms of becoming conscious of what it is: becoming self-conscious.⁶

From the start – the 'Preface' of the *Phenomenology* – Hegel puts forward the idea that the development from finite thinking to 'absolute knowing' is a continuous

and, even in light of its inconsistencies, a homogeneous evolution of consciousness or spirit. Absolute knowing does not represent truth in terms of knowing a certain type of matter of fact, but rather is supposed to capture the whole development of consciousness or spirit. Therefore, Hegel states: 'The True is the whole' (PS, GW9, 19). This phrase is not to be interpreted as an identity statement about the 'True', but given the context of the passage, as the explication that only the 'development' (*Entwicklung*) of the 'whole' – the series of consciousness – produces the true 'result', namely the true concept of the absolute as 'subject' (PS, GW9, 20). Since the structure of the 'whole' as 'development' coincides with the interconnection of its components, the 'true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of that truth' (PS, GW9, 11). In what follows it will become clear that the idea of 'system' as connectedness is meant to depict the evolution of the series of consciousness that brings about the true concept of the absolute as self-conscious 'subject', or as Hegel puts it, 'the true not only as substance but just as much as subject' (PS, GW9, 18). For the thinking subject or subjectivity as 'self-recognition' is 'the very ground and soil of science, or, knowing in its universality' (PS, GW9, 22), a 'ground', though, that not only lays the foundation of science but also, and even more importantly, is the result of the process of the evolution of the conscious mind. This evolution is the 'path of education' (*Bildung*) (PS, GW9, 46, 24–25; translation modified, D.H.), or the 'path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing' (PS, GW9, 55): 'The science of this path is the science of the experience consciousness goes through' (PS, GW9, 29). The *Phenomenology's* systematic programme is thus to picture the 'coming-to-be of science itself, or, of knowing' proceeding from basic shapes of consciousness to 'genuine knowledge' (PS, GW9, 24).

The question, of course, is how this task of systematically introducing to philosophy can be accomplished if the systematic tools that are required for this accomplishment are yet to be achieved in 'absolute knowing' as the not yet proven result of the introduction. This question turns out to be a metaphilosophical and not just a justificatory one. Since for Hegel metaphilosophy is philosophy of philosophy and since true philosophy is 'absolute knowing', the way 'absolute knowing' is established is the way we philosophize about philosophy. Hegel's metaphilosophical understanding of philosophy is peculiar though, for philosophizing about philosophy is not just theorizing about 'absolute knowing'. The claim rather is that 'absolute knowing' as a rational form of consciousness also has ontological meaning. True philosophy is hence not just a rational activity but has at the same time an ontological dimension. This claim can only be understood once 'absolute knowing' has been made the object of thought. Therefore, the metaphilosophical question about how the *Phenomenology* achieves its end must be answered first.

The answer to this question lies in Hegel's conception of the history of self-consciousness. The term 'history of self-consciousness' defines a methodological procedure that Fichte applied in the *Doctrine of Science* (1794) and Schelling in the *System of transcendental Idealism* (1800). In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel takes it up and remodels it as 'full history of the cultivation of consciousness itself into science' (PS, GW9, 56). The idea of the history of self-consciousness is to show how the human mind develops its cognitive capacities starting with primitive forms of consciousness,

which in the sequel are enriched by more complex forms until they finally culminate in the fully developed self-conscious cognitive subject. This developmental account of the genesis of the human mind explicates how the subject or subjectivity can function as a general philosophical basis without presupposing it as a first principle. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a whole is arranged as an interconnected 'series of the figurations of consciousness' (PS, GW9, 56). Unlike Fichte and Schelling, Hegel does not conceive of it as development of cognitive capacities but of epistemic claims that are stepwise examined by sceptical arguments. A form or figuration of consciousness can be defined as an idealized epistemic shape of consciousness within a specific epistemic domain such as sense, certainty, perception, reason or spirit. Accordingly, each form of consciousness must have its own standard that makes it possible to decide whether an epistemic claim is satisfied. For instance, the standard of sense certainty as a form of consciousness is 'immediacy' (PS, GW9, 63–70), namely non-inferentiality is the standard that natural consciousness sets up as the criterion for the analysis of the truth of its knowledge claims. In 'Sense certainty' consciousness examines whether its epistemic claims – beliefs based on sense impressions – meet the standard of immediacy. The outcome of this sceptical examination is that sense certainty does not meet its own standard since it turns out to be ultimately inferential knowledge and hence, according to its own standard, one of the forms of the 'non-truthful consciousness' (PS, GW9, 57). For sceptical reasons, which Hegel systematizes as 'self-consummating skepticism' (PS, GW9, 56), 'Sense certainty' fails as the form of *immediate* knowledge and must be overturned in favour of the subsequent form of consciousness and its new standard: 'Perception'.⁷

As the sceptical examination of the whole series of epistemic claims demonstrates, no shape of consciousness meets its standard except for 'absolute knowing' as the fully developed form of self-consciousness or self-knowledge. For in 'absolute knowing', which is self-consciousness, knowledge finally corresponds to its object and standard because here the knowing I is what it takes itself to be: 'I am I' (PS, GW9, 430–431). Thus, with the exception of 'Sense certainty' as the first form of consciousness, each of the ensuing forms of consciousness follows from the preceding one and comprises what consciousness has learned from its previous shape. In the course of this 'historical' and, as Hegel claims, necessary process, natural consciousness continuously develops into true 'absolute knowing': the only true shape that encompasses the entire experience consciousness made before.

'Absolute knowing' is not an extravagant kind of knowledge, neither in terms of form nor of content. The expression 'absolute knowing' must not be read literally but as Hegel's metaphilosophical designation of 'philosophy', the very domain where philosophical thought philosophizes about philosophy to reveal what philosophy is and how it is actualized. It is 'absolute' in that it does not depend on any other shape of knowledge and cannot be transformed into another one. It ensues the epistemic form of 'Religion', which is the product of epistemic and cultural education of spirit. 'Religion' and 'absolute knowing' are occupied with the same content: the absolute. However, whereas (Christian) religious belief relates to the absolute in terms of figurative representation, 'absolute knowing' recognizes the absolute conceptually in pure thought:

This last shape of spirit is that of 'absolute knowing', the spirit which at the same time gives to its complete and true content the form of the self, and as a result realizes its concept as well as remaining within its concept in this realization. It is spirit knowing itself in the shape of spirit, or it is comprehending conceptual knowing. Here truth is not only in itself completely the same as certainty, but it also has the shape of certainty of itself, or it is in its existence, which is to say, for the knowing spirit, in the form of knowing itself. Truth is the content, which in religion is not as yet the same as its certainty. However, this equality consists in the content receiving the shape of the self. As a result, what has come to be the element of existence, or the form of objectivity, is for consciousness what the essence itself is, namely, the concept. Spirit, appearing to consciousness in this element, or, what amounts to the same thing here, what is therein engendered by it, is science.

(PS, GW9, 427–428)

The 'element' of 'concept' as 'science' is what counts for Hegel as true philosophy. Philosophizing about philosophy is therefore equivalent to the domain of pure thought and its intrinsic goal: self-realization as self-consciousness or *truth*. Hegel does not conceive of this goal in purely abstract terms. For 'absolute knowing' or 'science' is the endpoint of a 'pathway' that not only comprises merely abstract forms of consciousness such as 'Sense certainty' or 'Perception' but also concrete historical, cultural and moral appearances of spirit in time. It does not come as a surprise that in 'absolute knowing' Hegel takes up the substance-subject claim he highlighted in the 'Preface'. There he urged to conceive 'the true not only as substance but just as much as subject' (PS, GW9, 18). Here it reads: 'subject is just as much substance' (PS, GW9, 431). On the 'pathway' of consciousness we take the true to be substance in its multiple concrete forms, but the only true form of consciousness that passes the examination of 'self-consummating skepticism' (PS, GW9, 56) is 'absolute knowing', namely substance conceived as subject:

For experience consists in precisely this, namely, that the content – and the content is spirit – is in itself, is substance and is therefore the object of consciousness. However, this substance, which is spirit, is its coming-to-be what it, the substance, is in itself; and it is as this coming-to-be which is taking a reflective turn into itself that spirit is truly in itself spirit. Spirit is in itself the movement which is cognition – the transformation of that former in-itself into for-itself, of substance into subject, of the object of consciousness into the object of self-consciousness, i.e., into an object that is just as much sublated, or into the concept. This transformation is the circle returning back into itself, which presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at the end.

(PS, GW9, 429)⁸

The *Phenomenology's* overall structure is hence deliberately circular, although not viciously circular, as Hegel claims. It is circular because it presupposes knowledge of the logical interconnections between the shapes of consciousness and that this knowledge is only achieved at the end in 'absolute knowing'.⁹ From the start Hegel's metaphilosophical goal is the realization of philosophy as science in terms of

self-consciousness. Thus, the purpose of philosophy is not to achieve *truth* in any standard sense – as a body of true propositions or even a full-fledged theory of (epistemic or non-epistemic) truth. The goal rather is to achieve philosophy's self-understanding by overcoming the 'difference between knowing and truth' (PS, GW9, 432) as it appears in every shape of consciousness as incongruence of what consciousness takes to be true (*für wahr hält*) and what is true. The method that elicits the coincidence of 'knowing and truth' in 'absolute knowing' is increasing self-reference of thought on the mind's 'pathway' to science or true philosophy. Self-reference or self-reflexivity must not be conceived as the methodological character trait exclusively of 'absolute knowing', but of philosophical reflection in general. Although self-awareness of spirit is only attained in the final shape of consciousness, it functions, for Hegel, as the overall methodological model that ultimately explains why being and thought coincide. It is because both of them reveal the same self-referential structures that they finally turn out to be the same. On Hegel's view, phenomenological metaphilosophy must generate the insight that the full rational conceptualization of self-consciousness or the 'I am I' is the only key to comprehend what the purpose and nature of philosophy is. It is more than obvious that this idea of metaphilosophy is very different from contemporary accounts of philosophy of philosophy.¹⁰ The most important difference is that whereas for the majority of contemporary philosophers philosophy's main ambition is to solve philosophical problems, specifically, to answer philosophical questions such as 'What is the good?', 'What is causation?', 'Is abortion ethical?' etc., Hegel's understanding of what philosophy should be, is more fundamental since it is based on the view that philosophy must convey insight into absolute subjectivity to realize what the world is. The way philosophy accomplishes this is itself spelled out by absolute subjectivity. A great deal of what Hegel's phenomenological metaphilosophy indicates in 'absolute knowing' foreshadows what his metaphilosophical views in the *Science of Logic* make explicit.

Logical metaphilosophy

The view that philosophy is the rational or 'thoughtful examination [*denkende Betrachtung*] of things' such that 'thinking becomes knowing and a knowing that comprehends things [*begreifendes Erkennen*]' (EL, §2), I call 'logical metaphilosophy'. In the *Philosophy of Right* logical metaphilosophy is put the following way: 'To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason' (PR, 21, 'Preface').¹¹ By comprehending the essentialities of things, philosophy *ipso facto* comprehends itself in that it rationally determines *what* being is by way of conceiving it as determined through essence. This three partite thought process, *being – essence – concept*, reveals a self-referential logical structure that explicates on the level of concept not only as *what* being must be rationally conceived but also that philosophy as the science of the concept comprehends itself. In compliance with the completeness claim, 'to comprehend *what is*' amounts therefore to the rational self-comprehension of philosophy.

Analogously to phenomenological metaphilosophy, logical metaphilosophy, too, is a consequence of Hegel's intellectual development. As indicated above, by the year of

the publication of the *Phenomenology* Hegel had conjoined logic and metaphysics as the new 'science of the absolute': 'Logic ... coincides with metaphysics, i.e. the science of things captured in thoughts that have counted as expressing the essentialities of things' (EL, §24). For ultimately systematic reasons he became aware that although the *Phenomenology* can serve as a didactical introduction to logic as metaphysics, it cannot justify or even deduce the *Logic*, for the science of the absolute is independent of preceding validation. It must demonstrate its truth merely internally.¹² Hence, in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel presents a system of self-referential thought determinations that not only sets out from the completeness claim but culminates in the 'Doctrine of the Concept' in the assertion that philosophy is the 'logical science as the pure concept conceptually comprehending itself' (WdL, GW12, 253; translation altered). As a consequence, the completeness claim is fulfilled once the conceptual self-comprehension of thought is achieved, that is, pure (absolute) subjectivity is attained. Here I shall focus on how Hegel thinks the metaphilosophical self-conceptualization of philosophy in the 'Doctrine of the Concept' evolves and what role he assigns to scepticism to establish self-thinking as the very nature of philosophy. In the course of these considerations it turns out that, like in the *Phenomenology*, Hegelian metaphilosophy, rather than being concerned with solving concrete philosophical problems, aims to produce a comprehensive rational conception of reality as such. Hegel's philosophy of philosophy therefore is metaphilosophical holism rather than particularism.

Logical metaphilosophy is special in that, unlike many modern philosophers, Hegel does not model his *logic* after the underlying idea of the individual cognizer whose thinking is tied to cognitive capacities such that it is merely *subjective* thinking. For Hegel 'thinking' is rather 'objective' (WdL, GW21, 34, cf. 21.35 and EL, §§24–25). True logical 'thinking' is not confined to 'the opposition of consciousness' (WdL, GW21, 33) – the subjective limitations naturally pertaining to the individual cognizer – and is therefore independent of capacities or restrictions of use and validity.¹³ The rather modern idea of logical form and content of thought must hence be suspended, not only because it is subjective prejudice but also because it is, for Hegel, one-sided in terms of incompleteness. As we will see, as a theory of pure thought determinations Hegel's logic comes in a way closer to the ancient idea of thinking *in general* than to the modern conception of thinking as tied to the individual thinker. But this orientation does not qualify Hegel's (meta)philosophy as old-style metaphysics. On the contrary, Hegel conceives his logic rather as a systematic critique of metaphysics.¹⁴ The objective logic is supposed to replace the former (special) metaphysics of soul, world and God. Insofar as it comprises *Being* and *Essence* it substitutes classical ontology as 'that part of metaphysics intended to investigate the nature of *ens* in general' (WdL, GW21, 48). This move is crucial because the objective logic examines the *ens* independently of (subjective) 'determinations of thought' that former metaphysics considered to be the forms by means of which the 'substrates' of 'representation' such as soul, world and God are made objects of thought (WdL, GW21, 49; cf. WdL, GW12, 28). The project of the *Science of Logic*, rather, is to consider the thought determinations independently of the way subjective representation conceives the *ens*. The metaphilosophical conclusion of this effort is drawn in the subjective logic, namely in the 'Logic of the Concept',

where being and essence are thought as integrated, that is, as *concept*. Since the logical status of the thought determinations is not subjective but objective, logic

contains thought in so far as this thought is equally the thing as it is in itself; or the thing in itself in so far as this is equally pure thought. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness as it develops itself and has the shape of the self, so that that which exists in and for itself is the conscious concept and the concept as such is that which exists in and for itself.

(WdL, GW21, 49; translation altered)

The 'conscious concept' results from the recursive development of being and essence into their identity. The *concept* is thus the 'absolute unity of being and reflection': it is immediacy (being) as in itself determined beyond essence (WdL, GW11, 12). The unification of being and essence in the concept reveals Hegel's effort to demonstrate that essence must not be thought of as an external determination of being, for example as its ground or *ousia* through which being is *what* it is. As the 'Doctrine of the Concept' shows, being and essence must necessarily be thought of together rather than in a binary framework as two related but independent existents.

At first sight, the true unification of being and essence seems to be achieved at the level of what 'exists in and for itself', which is 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*), such that the 'becoming' (WdL, GW12, 11) of the concept is finally completed through the unity of being and essence. If this would be so, no further metaphilosophical reflection would be required since *actuality* would then figure as the achieved result of the aimed-for subject-object identity in thinking. But this is not the case. Initially *actuality* as the in-and-for-itself must be conceived as substance or substantiality, as the *actual*, which is the unity of *actuality* and *possibility*. This unity is, however, not a homogeneous but a multifaceted, complex structure such that substance does not reach identity in-and-for-itself.¹⁵ True identity in-and-for-itself is only achieved at the level of the *concept*, more specifically as 'the concept of the concept' (WdL, GW12, 16). It is *this* meta-conception of 'the concept of the concept' that prefigures Hegel's metaphilosophical conception of philosophy of philosophy.

The key to Hegel's philosophy of philosophy lies thus in his understanding of what *concept* is. Compared to, for example, the Kantian theory, Hegel's conception of *concept* is non-standard. In the *Science of Logic*, he says that philosophy must abstract from the 'ordinary understanding' (WdL, GW12, 16) of what *concept* allegedly is. Hegel holds the *prima facie* peculiar view that the 'concept ... is none other than the "I" or pure self-consciousness' (WdL, GW12, 17). Although one might find this view mysterious, there are, from the Hegelian perspective, good reasons for holding it. The model Hegel has in mind for what the (pure) concept essentially is, coincides with Kant's doctrine of the original-synthetic unity of apperception. For Kant the concept is *repraesentatio universalis* or general (universal) representation. As far as universality is concerned, Hegel basically agrees and points out that the pure 'I', too, distinguishes itself through 'universality', for the 'I' is the 'self-referring unity', 'abstracting from all determinateness and content' (WdL, GW12, 17). But in addition,

the 'I' is, for Hegel, also 'singularity, absolute determinateness that stands opposed to anything other and excludes it' (WdL, GW12, 17). Although, according to Kant, 'singularity' is the distinguishing feature solely of intuition as *repraesentatio singularis* (singular representation), Hegel connects both, universality and singularity, with Kant's conception of the transcendental unity of apperception, which he declares to be the 'essence of the concept' (WdL, GW12, 17). For Kant considers the 'I' as the understanding and its (categorical) unity as the 'object': 'this objective unity is the unity of the "I" with itself' (WdL, GW12, 18). Hegel is certainly right in attributing to Kant the view that the 'transcendental unity of apperception' is vital in the sense that it represents the pure 'unity' in which 'a concept of the object' is united (CPR B 139, cf. B 137). This, however, is only true under the condition that intuition is the source of the given that is to be united. For abstract concepts as such are empty. Hegel does not pay attention to this crucial restriction. What he praises in Kant is the connection of self-consciousness and *concept* independently of the given manifold in intuition. Accordingly, on the purely conceptual level, concept is conceived as self-consciousness, for like in 'Absolute Knowing' of the *Phenomenology*, what self-consciousness achieves is the conceptual identity of thinking and what thought is, namely of subject and object: 'The objectivity of thought is here [in Kant's Transcendental Deduction, D.H.], therefore, specifically defined: it is an identity of concept and thing which is the truth' (WdL, GW12, 23; cf. *ibid.*, 34 and EL, §31 A). Now, since the *concept* is the 'I' and since, along Kantian lines, thinking is essentially carried out by means of concepts, Hegel interprets the 'I' as pure thinking such that the *concept* of the *concept* must be conceived as thinking of thinking: as the 'I' that thinks itself. It is for this reason that Hegel's philosophy of philosophy takes the form of metatheoretical self-determination of philosophy in *pure thought*.

Metaphilosophical self-determination in pure thought cannot, however, be attained through 'ordinary' concepts. Hegel dismisses in particular the Kantian theory of concept that only abstracts from 'a concrete material this or that mark' (WdL, GW12, 21) and 'raises' it 'to the form of universality' (WdL, GW12, 20) such that there is, on the one hand, a given 'reality in and for itself' and, on the other, 'an empty form' pertaining to the understanding that 'obtains' this given 'reality' or 'content'. He objects that on this view 'concept is as such not yet complete', and must therefore still 'be raised to the idea which alone is the unity of the concept and reality; and this is a result which will have to emerge in what follows from the nature of the concept itself' (WdL, GW12, 20).¹⁶ Hegel confronts what he takes to be the incompleteness of abstract concepts with the metaphilosophical completeness claim and defines the 'absolute idea' as the systematic place where completion is accomplished.

Here I can only discuss some of the most important aspects that Hegel addresses in the chapter 'The Absolute Idea', where the metaphilosophical self-determination of the concept as absolute subjectivity is completed. Already in the introduction to the 'Doctrine of the Concept' Hegel announces that the 'consummation' of the concept takes place in the 'sphere of the Idea' where 'the concept attains the realization absolutely adequate to it, and is free inasmuch as in this real world, in its objectivity,

it recognizes its subjectivity, and in this subjectivity recognizes that objective world' (WdL, GW12, 30). The object of concept's self-recognition is not concrete reality that somehow mirrors or reflects the logical structure of the concept as such. The concept's self-recognition is pure *intellectual* self-relation that unites the subject and the object of thought. What Hegel is developing in the 'Idea' is analogous to the *Phenomenology's* 'absolute knowing'. While the *Phenomenology's* self-fulfilling scepticism drives *consciousness* to finally cognize itself as 'I am I', it is, in the *Science of Logic*, pure *thought* that realizes and cognizes itself in the 'Idea' as absolute subjectivity: 'spirit recognizes the idea as its absolute truth, as the truth that is in and for itself: the infinite idea in which cognizing and doing are equalized, and which is the 'absolute knowing' [*das absolute Wissen*] of itself' (WdL, GW12, 178; translation altered).

These are challenging claims. To a certain extent they are more accessible in the *Encyclopaedia's* 'Philosophy of Mind' than in the *Science of Logic*. In §553 of the *Encyclopaedia* (1830) Hegel points out that 'the concept of mind has its reality in the mind' and that this is 'knowledge of the absolute idea'.¹⁷ The final section of the *Encyclopaedia's* 'Philosophy of Mind', which explicates in its concluding paragraphs (572–577) the 'idea of philosophy' (EPM, §577), that is Hegel's philosophy of philosophy, takes up what the *Science of Logic* expounds in 'The Absolute Idea'.¹⁸ The section 'The Absolute Mind' conveys that 'truth is the object of philosophy' (EPM, §571) and that – like in the *Phenomenology* – philosophy must be conceived as the conceptual 'unity of Art and Religion' 'raised to self-conscious thought' (EPM, §572, cf. WdL, GW12, 236). Hegel's philosophy of philosophy is therefore clearly truth-directed. As he highlights in the *Science of Logic*, 'truth' 'is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy' (WdL, GW12, 236). The truth philosophy strives for can, however, only be attained as absolute unity of thinking subjectivity. The underlying motif of this reasoning is pervasive in 'The Absolute Mind' and explicitly spelled out in §574: 'This concept of philosophy is the idea that thinks itself, the knowing truth' (see also EPM, §577). The metaphysical determination of philosophy consists thus in pure self-reflexive thinking that is moulded after Aristotle's *noesis noeseos* as the thinking that thinks itself. A clear indication for this is the long classical quote from the *Metaphysics* directly following the last paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia*.¹⁹ The truth-directedness of Hegel's idea of philosophy is hence not to be misconstrued as epistemic guideline for the individual virtuous cognizer who aims at knowing reality as it concretely is. For Hegel's concept of truth is non-epistemic: it does not depend on what the individual cognizer can know in general. Hegel's philosophy of philosophy is in every respect detached from epistemic conditions and cognition of matters of fact. It seems therefore alien to modern and contemporary conceptions of philosophy since it draws from the strongly metaphysically motivated ancient idea of divine *nous*.²⁰ But Hegel's idea of philosophy as conceptual self-determination is likewise different from ancient thought in that it conceives the thinking of thinking in terms of modern subjectivity. Although ancient thought is familiar with the idea of self-referential cognition as such, the conception of the thinking I or apperception that refers to itself through *conceptual* self-determination with the aim of fully developed subjectivity rather belongs to modern thought.

In the *Logic*, Hegel conjoins both traditions by combining dialectic and scepticism. The *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* defines 'scepticism' explicitly as 'the dialectical moment itself' (EL, §78). Scepticism's primary function is to annihilate the finite forms of cognition: 'The high scepticism of antiquity accomplishes this by showing that every one of those forms contained a contradiction within itself' (EL, §24 A3). Ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism in particular shows that finite thinking is constrained to subjective epistemic conditions that not only restrict cognition itself but also ban the criticism of the possibility of cognition beyond those constraints. This is a crucial philosophical insight for Hegel. In *On the Relation between Scepticism and Philosophy* (1801) he writes that scepticism is not a threat to philosophical cognition 'since every genuine philosophy has this negative side'.²¹ The interpretation of scepticism as true philosophy's 'negative side' shows that Hegel aims at integrating scepticism into philosophy by assimilating it with dialectic. This connection between scepticism and dialectic is not at all haphazard, but systematically motivated. Accordingly, finite cognition is exhausted by fixation of its concepts as Hegel repeatedly argues with respect to the Kantian and Fichtean categories. On the other hand, the pure fixation of finite concepts such as in Kant and Fichte is one-sided and hence incomplete. Now Hegel claims that furthermore the determinations of finite understanding have to be opposed, like in Kant's antinomies, and finally sublated by their unification through speculative thought. At this point scepticism as the 'dialectical moment' comes in: 'The dialectical, taken separately on its own by the understanding, constitutes scepticism, especially when it is exhibited in scientific concepts. Scepticism contains the mere negation that results from the dialectic' (EL, §81). The (sceptical) function of dialectic is to reveal the 'one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding' (EL, §81), and this means their 'negation'. This is also accomplished by scepticism in that the sceptic raises doubts and negates epistemic claims. Unlike dialectic, scepticism does not go any farther than demonstrating the 'negation' of the 'determinations of the understanding'. However, scepticism is capable of recognizing the positive content of its 'negation'. Consequently, scepticism and dialectic coincide only in as much as both reveal finite understanding's intrinsic negativity. Nonetheless, finite understanding cannot be aware of dialectic itself but exclusively of the sceptical negation of epistemic claims. Since finite understanding is incapable of reaching dialectical insights it must accept scepticism as a fundamental threat to its prerogatives. By contrast 'genuine philosophy' itself is not affected by sceptical doubts for true philosophy 'contains the sceptical as a moment within itself – specifically as the dialectical moment' (EL, §81 A2).

It is thus the method of counter-position or negation that makes scepticism dialectical. For finite understanding, it *prima facie* looks as if scepticism, by means of counter-position or negation, can prevent the human mind from acquiring metaphilosophical cognition: self-determining thinking of thinking or absolute subjectivity. But the true meaning of scepticism is for Hegel the 'dialectical moment': scepticism's nullification of finite reflection by means of sceptical doubt to promote philosophy of philosophy in pure thinking of thinking. In conjunction with each other, scepticism and dialectic are thus indispensable components in Hegel's conception of philosophy of philosophy.

Conclusion

Metaphilosophy is a major theme in Hegel's philosophy. As we have seen, for Hegel, metaphilosophy is philosophy of philosophy, and philosophy of philosophy must be conceived in terms of thinking of thinking, namely self-determination of pure thought. Hegelian metaphilosophy is part of philosophy itself and not external to it. Metaphilosophy as philosophy of philosophy is therefore philosophical meta-reflection. As meta-reflection it provokes the question how philosophy can possibly determine itself in pure thought independently of any preceding theoretical commitment. For Hegel, this is possible in pure self-reflexive thought or subjectivity. Two major attempts to carry out this project of metaphilosophy can be distinguished in Hegel: phenomenological and logical metaphilosophy. Phenomenological metaphilosophy tries to demonstrate how epistemic natural consciousness develops necessarily into 'absolute knowing', which is, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the domain of metaphilosophy. The problem that arises in this conception of metaphilosophy is that the development of the epistemic shapes of consciousness turns out to be circular because it presupposes the logical structures that are supposed to be made available only at its endpoint in 'absolute knowing'. Already in the *Phenomenology* it is clear that Hegelian metaphilosophy must be conceived as a self-reflexive cognitive activity because what is ultimately thought in 'absolute knowing' is the 'I am I' or self-consciousness.

Hegel was clearly aware of the threat of circularity in the *Phenomenology*. He therefore modifies his views fundamentally in what I have termed 'logical metaphilosophy'. According to this second attempt, philosophy of philosophy is the conceptual self-comprehension of philosophy in pure thinking or absolute subjectivity. Hegel develops this idea in the *Science of Logic* as well as in the *Encyclopaedia*. The crucial point is that Hegel conceives of *concept* as (Kantian) transcendental apperception such that philosophy of philosophy is the concept of the concept, the thinking that is in agreement with itself. This thinking of thinking is ultimately modelled after the Aristotelian *noesis noeseos* that Hegel interprets as absolute subjectivity. Since the logic is the self-sufficient science of the absolute, logical metaphilosophy is not entangled in the type of circularity that turned out to be the main problem for phenomenological metaphilosophy. Logical metaphilosophy is, however, confronted with epistemic circularity: the circularity of self-consciousness. The circularity of self-consciousness concerns the problem of self-representation or self-knowledge of an I that to represent or know itself as itself must already have a representation or knowledge of itself. This circularity of self-consciousness emerges in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* too, but as such it does not concern metaphilosophy as the 'historical' evolution of epistemic claims according to a systematically organized, necessary structure of knowing consciousness (see above). For logical metaphilosophy, however, it does pose a serious problem. For Hegelian philosophy of philosophy is self-referential thinking: a cognitive activity that ultimately results in absolute subjectivity for which the structure of self-consciousness is the cognitive paradigm case. For this reason, if self-consciousness turns out to be impossible because it is intrinsically circular, then logical metaphilosophy is unfeasible too. Logical metaphilosophy therefore depends crucially on the conceptual feasibility of self-consciousness and must be worked out from there.

Notes

- 1 There are, of course, several other prominent places where Hegel addresses metaphilosophical questions such as the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* or the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* as well as the Jena journal articles and drafts. Although these texts are important, I will only consider them insofar as they further clarify what Hegel says in the books mentioned above.
- 2 Quotes from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (PS) are from Pinkard and Baur's translation (2018). Where necessary, I have altered the translation and/or consulted A.V. Miller's earlier translation Hegel (1977). For all quotations from Hegel's work I usually provide the volume and page number(s) from the *Gesammelte Werke* (1968 ff.).
- 3 See, for example, Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood (2013), Miolli (2017: 85–105) and Theunissen (2014: 89–112).
- 4 All quotations from the *Encyclopaedia Logic* are from Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation with reference to paragraphs.
- 5 On the intellectual development of the Jena Hegel, see Düsing (1995: 75–108, 150–159).
- 6 Theunissen (2014) interprets the *Phenomenology* explicitly as a metaphilosophical conception in the sense that 'consciousness' functions as a metatheoretical notion that describes the structure of philosophical theories, namely the *Phenomenology's* shapes of consciousness, independent of theoretical presuppositions. This is why the *Phenomenology* provides a self-standing proof or justification of the science of logic. To my mind, this interpretation is hard to defend, not least because, for Hegel, truth-conducive justification is threatened by sceptical doubts (see Heidemann 2007: 323–348; for a critical discussion see also Miolli 2017: esp. 111–117, and Miolli's contribution, Chapter 26, in this volume). What is more, Theunissen's use of 'metaphilosophy' is different from mine. Whereas Theunissen limits Hegel's 'metaphilosophy' to the relation between *Phenomenology* and logic, my understanding of 'metaphilosophy' in Hegel is broader since it also covers the domain of conceptual self-determination in the logic.
- 7 On Hegel's implementation of the problem of the standard, see Heidemann (2008: 13–15). Cf. also Heidemann (2011).
- 8 The pathway of consciousness is, Hegel says, 'the transformation ... of substance into subject, of the object of consciousness into the object of self-consciousness' (PhG, GW9, 429).
- 9 As a consequence of his metaphilosophical interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, Theunissen (2014) denies circularity, whereas I think that the phenomenological philosopher who presents consciousness' pathway, must already have the knowledge that the true theory, namely the logic, must yet provide subsequent to the *Phenomenology*.
- 10 Williamson (2007: ix–x), just to mention one 'classic' of contemporary metaphilosophy, would probably dispute the meaningfulness of Hegel's account of metaphilosophy for its *intellectualist* contentions. On the other hand, like Hegel he insists that metaphilosophy is not external to philosophy but 'automatically part of philosophy'. Probably like Williamson, Hegel would reject the term 'metaphilosophy' because it insinuates of being 'beyond'.

- 11 Quotes from the *Element of the Philosophy of Right* (PR) are from Nisbet's translation.
- 12 In the Introduction to the *Science of Logic* Hegel insists that the logic 'cannot say what it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole treatment' (WdL, GW12, 27) (quotations from the *Science of Logic* [SL] are from di Giovanni's translation).
- 13 See Hegel's critique of cognitive capacities (WdL, GW12, 17–19).
- 14 This is clear from the *Encyclopaedia's* three 'Positions of Thought with Respect to Objectivity' (EL, §§26–78). It is the first position in particular that is directed against (pre-Kantian, rationalist) 'metaphysics' (EL, §§ 26–36).
- 15 Here I cannot comment on 'Actuality' in detail. See Emundts (2018).
- 16 See PR, §21 A: 'Truth in philosophy means that the concept is in agreement with reality.'
- 17 Quotations from the *Encyclopedia's Philosophy of Mind* are from Wallace's translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) with references to paragraphs.
- 18 For the purpose of this chapter I can ignore the obvious systematic differences between the minor and the major logic.
- 19 Met. XII 7. 1072b18–30. On Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's *noesis noeseos* in the *Encyclopaedia*, see Düsing (2004).
- 20 There is a long, still ongoing controversy whether or not Hegel's logic and philosophy in general must be interpreted in the light of the classical ancient metaphysics of the (divine) mind (see Düsing 1995 and Siep 2018). Given the existing textual basis, especially of the *Encyclopaedia*, I find it hard to deny that Hegel takes up and reinterprets this tradition.
- 21 Cf. SP, 325.

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Science as Experience of Freedom: Hegel on the Scientific Nature of Philosophy

Luca Illetterati

Introduction

For Hegel, philosophy is unquestionably science, but it is not simply *a* science. What does it mean that philosophy is science, but it is not *a* science? For Hegel, philosophy is science without being a science because unlike any particular scientific discipline, which finds its legitimation in an object that makes up the field of investigation of the discipline and in a method that guarantees the correctness of its procedure, it cannot presuppose anything about its content and method. For Hegel, philosophy, to be itself, cannot depend on anything external to itself; this means that in philosophy there is nothing that can be accepted as true beyond the process of justification that it itself activates, and there is nothing that can be accepted as the foundation of its own proceeding outside of its own proceeding. It is precisely in this self-founded structure that philosophy reveals its peculiar kind of scientificity: in having to account for everything and in not assuming anything as already given. Therefore, for Hegel, philosophy is science because it is the negation of any external authority that can impose itself on it, and because it is a discursive procedure that is called in its concrete practice to account for every element at work in it. In this sense, Hegel's position seems to be an outdated one, if it is true that the contemporary debate seems in many ways polarized within two very opposing positions: one connected to the hermeneutical and deconstructionist tradition, according to which philosophy is something meaningful because it is not science, and one in many ways connected to the analytical tradition, according to which philosophy must be a scientific discipline to be a meaningful activity. The hermeneutic and deconstructionist tradition finds in many ways its basis in the position of Martin Heidegger, according to whom, as is well known, philosophy is not science; not only is it not science but also, more radically still, it cannot and must not be. The questions of philosophy, in fact, according to Heidegger, do not have the same status as the questions that belong to the sciences. If one were to make explicit the specific mode of philosophical questioning, one would have to recognize, according to Heidegger, that it is that form of questioning in which the questioner calls into question the totality itself and therefore, in that totality, his own questioning

intention or himself as the questioner. Philosophical inquiry, according to Heidegger, is a questioning 'in which we inquire into being as a whole and inquire in such a way that in so doing we ourselves, the questioners, are thereby also included in the question, placed into question' (Heidegger 1995: 9). It is precisely in contrast to an idea like this (i.e. in contrast to the idea that philosophy is characterized by questions that do not have the same status as the questions that characterize all scientific disciplines) that Timothy Williamson develops his argumentation in his 2007 book *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. One of the main theses of Williamson's book is that of the *unexceptional nature of philosophy* (Williamson 2007: 3). His idea is that we should dispense with this way of understanding philosophy, which considers it as characterized by an irreducible peculiarity compared to any other type of discourse. In this sense, Williamson rejects what he sees as the rhetoric of irreducibility and radical difference, which he associates with philosophy's claim to be a special discourse that alone would be able to consider other sciences and for this very reason would have substantially nothing in common with them. Williamson's work develops around this idea and ultimately aims to build (and legitimize) a discourse that enables us to see philosophy as a specific discipline, just as other scientific disciplines are. Being a scientific discipline means, for Williamson, to be a form of knowledge that proceeds by building hypotheses and testing them. In philosophy, this character of scientificity would be defined in a specific way (i.e. without recourse to experiments and taking ordinary human knowledge as a field of evidence for testing). In this sense, for Williamson philosophy is certainly a science and it is in the same sense in which every science is.

In an attempt to see how the contemporary debate intersects with Hegelian philosophy, one should say that for Hegel, as for Williamson, philosophy is science. For Hegel, however, as for Heidegger, philosophy does not have the same status as particular sciences. From this perspective, philosophy is not *a* science. Unlike Heidegger, however, Hegel does not believe that this difference implies a denial of the scientific character of philosophy. In this sense, Hegel can be considered as an exceptionalist in Williamson's terms, although in a particular sense, as Hegel does not deny the scientific nature of philosophy at all.

In this chapter, I propose some considerations on Hegel's philosophy (and, in passing, also Kant's) moving from the general background opened by the issues outlined above. In particular, what will be considered here is the relationship that is established in Hegel between the notion of philosophy and that of science. To highlight the characteristics of this peculiar scientific nature of philosophy, we must also investigate the relationship that philosophy establishes, according to Hegel, with the non-philosophical sciences.

What I intend to highlight here is (a) what are the characteristics that, according to Hegel, make philosophy scientific, and (b) what is the relationship that is established in Hegel's system of philosophy between philosophical science and non-philosophical sciences.

Moving from this general picture, the path I will follow will start from what one can call the paradoxical nature of the scientific nature of philosophy in Hegel. Then I analyze the roots of this paradoxical nature in the Kantian conception of philosophy as activity. I will then return to Hegel to highlight the difference in status between

philosophy and non-philosophical science. I then investigate Hegel's statement concerning the genesis of philosophy from experience and the complex relation between philosophy and non-philosophical sciences. Finally, in the conclusion, I demonstrate how Hegelian exceptionalism is based on a conception of philosophy as a radical experience of freedom.

The (paradoxical) scientific nature of philosophy

In a fragment of the first lectures he gave in Jena in 1801–1802, Hegel dwells on the scientific character of philosophy and on the – in many ways aporetic – problems that its peculiar scientific nature implies. In these lectures, Hegel proposes an 'Introduction in philosophiam' (Introduction to Philosophy) – the title of his course – and starts from what immediately appears to be a paradox: in introducing philosophy, one must first observe, Hegel maintains, that 'philosophy, as science, does not need an introduction, nor does it tolerate it' (GW5, 259). It is interesting to note that according to Hegel, the impossibility of the introduction to philosophy is connected to its scientific character (*Philosophie als Wissenschaft*). This does not mean that there is no introduction to scientific disciplines. Indeed, according to Hegel, each particular science must necessarily be preceded by an introduction 'in which its specific place among the other [sciences] must be indicated' (GW5, 259). Each particular science must first be indicated both in terms of the field it deals with, what could be said to be its 'object', and the methodology with which that field is intended to be investigated. Therefore, if philosophy is a science that does not admit and does not tolerate any form of introduction, this evidently means that it is science in a different sense from the others. A point to which Hegel continually returned to up to his last published texts – that is, the last editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1827–1830) – was that philosophy, in fact, unlike other sciences, does not have a given object from which it is determined, and likewise it cannot presume a given method for its discourse, and that is why philosophy does not admit an introduction.

A further indication of a more determined understanding of the difference in status between particular sciences and philosophy is the distinction that Hegel already proposes in another text of the Jena period, *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, between the concept of science (*Wissenschaft*) and the concept of knowledge (*Kenntnis*).¹ Knowledge, Hegel says here, 'is concerned with alien objects' (DIFF, 85); that is, it is a knowledge of something that presents itself as something else with respect to the cognitive process; it is a movement that knowledge makes in the direction of something separate from it and that, as something else and separate, necessarily presents itself as something given. In this sense *knowledge*, as it is always knowledge of something given, cannot but presuppose the object towards which it is intended. On the other hand, *science* in its most proper and distinctive meaning cannot, according to Hegel, assume anything as a presupposition and as given. In the very moment in which it would do so (i.e. in the very moment in which it would assume something as a given and therefore as a presupposition), it would no longer be *science*, but it would be *knowledge*. Science, in this sense, needs as its own condition that

a kind of emptiness is previously produced; an emptiness that arises from the critical and sceptical attitude of rejection of what simply presents itself as a given and which is concretized in the act of taking away any value of stability and absoluteness from the determined contents that knowledge tends to assume as its own object.² Therefore, being science, for philosophy, means accepting this discomfort – *das Unbequeme* as Hegel says in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia* (E17, §2) – that is, it cannot assume anything in the form of a given. Such a presupposition would prevent philosophy from being what it claims to be, that is, a science not of something, but of totality, or a science that necessarily and by its nature transcends the limits of particularity.

From this point of view, philosophy finds itself in a paradoxical condition, so that what makes it scientific – what enables it to be the scientific comprehension of reality as a totality – is what prevents it from accepting the kind of scientificity that is proper to all other sciences.

This leads to what is perhaps the preeminent and the most problematic characteristic of the scientific nature of philosophy, which is expressed in its self-foundationality. Philosophy cannot rely on anything external to itself because this assumption of a point of support outside itself would make it a particular knowledge, a knowledge that moves from a given.³ The need for the self-foundation of philosophy led Hegel to the elaboration of a model of science that is characterized by the fact that it cannot be taken for granted because it can never be fully adapted to some consolidated practice, and that it is continuously established as a procedure that is based on its own process. Science, in this radical meaning, is never, according to Hegel, *already* founded, and for this reason no introduction, in the sense of a determination of the object that is addressed, is possible. Indeed, there is nothing on which it can rely as a foundation that can guarantee its stability, if not its own proceeding according to reason, that is, according to a normativity internal to the thought itself. For its foundation, Hegel says in the Jena lectures, philosophy 'needs nothing else, nor can it use anything external, because outside its source, outside of reason, there is nothing' (GW5, 259). This does not mean that there is nothing outside the subject, outside the minds of the thinking subjects (as in a naïve idealism), but rather that everything that philosophy can say can be founded in nothing other than in reason.⁴

In this sense, *science* has not so much to do with the *knowledge* of an external object as with itself, so to speak. Science is in fact, in the Hegelian perspective, the process by which reason recognizes itself in the other from itself, in such a way that by recognizing itself and therefore having itself 'as an object', it founds in reason, according to Hegel, 'its whole work and activity' (DIFE, 87).

This concept of science embodied by philosophy – for which it does not possess any object that justifies its disciplinary sphere, does not enjoy a foundation on which to base itself, does not presuppose anything, not even the logical structure of the discourse within which it also takes place – is what makes philosophy, according to a Hegelian expression of the Heidelberg edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, the 'science of freedom' (E17, §5 R).

To be a 'science of freedom' does not mean to be a science of *something*, but rather to be that continuous process of denial of all the authoritative claims *external* to reason to which, according to the foundationalist perspective that Hegel criticizes and

deconstructs, showing its intimate contradictions (in the foundational perspective, according to Hegel, the foundation is necessarily unfounded), reason should adapt to be able to draw the truth. Claims may arise in the form of revealed knowledge, the discourse of a particular science, a determined authoritative power, experience as the tribunal of truth, subjective conceptual schemes, or even an objectivity assumed as true.

It is only in this way (i.e. denying any external authority over the free and autonomous procedure of thought by itself) that philosophy, going back to the fragment of Hegel's first lectures in Jena, can correspond to the original need from which it arises: 'from it and through it learn to live' (GW5, 260). That is, it is only in this form that philosophy can correspond to the practical demands from which it comes and to which it must return if it is to be effectively what it is. Philosophy teaches us how to live, according to Hegel, because it implies a radical experience of freedom that is negatively expressed as liberation from any authoritative constraint claimed to be true independently of the process of its justification, and positively as the ability to develop thought moving from nothing but thought itself. Philosophy teaches us how to live, according to Hegel, because life is truly itself only if it is freedom, that is, only if it realizes that experience that philosophy itself in its activity embodies.

Philosophy as discipline and philosophy as activity

Although in these years Hegel can often be seen to be carving out his philosophical position in dispute with critical philosophy, it is possible to see in this idea that through philosophy one can learn to live the trace of a certain Kantian imprint. Turning now to some of the characteristics of Kant's conception of philosophy can therefore help to bring out the peculiar elements of the *sui generis* concept of science that Hegel attributes to philosophy.

For Kant, philosophy *does not exist* as a given scientific discipline. That would require, as a basic element, a set of shared notions characterized by clear evidence. But philosophy does not have these features: it cannot exhibit such a set of shared knowledge supported by such evidence as to be assumed as true by a scientific community. Moreover, this lack of philosophy as a discipline is, in Kant's view, also what makes substantially impossible, as we can read for example in the introduction to the so-called Jaesche Logic, the enterprise of both those who claim to teach and those who want to learn philosophy (Kant 1992: 535–539). More clearly stated: in relation to philosophy, what can be taught, and consequently what can be learned, according to Kant, is, if anything, 'philosophizing', namely the tools that allow an individual to think philosophically, that is, to think autonomously and freely. But that does not mean, according to Kant, learning philosophy itself. Just as learning some specific philosophy does not mean engaging in that autonomous and free exercise of reason which philosophy implies, because the acquisition of a philosophy is always the acquisition of the thought of others and not of one's own. To adequately understand the distinction drawn by Kant between philosophy and philosophizing, it is necessary to take a step back and consider the difference, which Kant takes

over from the modern tradition that preceded him, between *historical knowledge* and *rational knowledge*. 'Historical knowledge' derives from experience and, for this reason, is defined in terms of a *cognitio ex datis*, while 'rational knowledge' can be obtained purely by following the principles of reason and is therefore defined as *cognitio ex principiis*. This distinction can be read on an *objective* level (i.e. in relation to the content of knowledge) – in this case rational knowledge is knowledge of *rational objects*, such as a mathematical theorem or a logical inference – or on a *subjective* level (i.e. in relation to *the way in which a given content is known*) – if a theorem is simply learned without its demonstration being known, one is dealing with a *subjectively* historical knowledge of an *objectively* rational content.

From this point of view, what determines the rationality of knowledge is the fact that it actually takes place through a process in which the cognitive content is disclosed by the subject in an autonomous way, that is, by deriving knowledge from principles. Equally, what determines the historicity of knowledge is not so much its empirical content as the fact that a certain content, which can also be rational, is learned as a datum.

But what exactly does it mean to learn philosophy as a datum, or *historically*? Learning philosophy historically may involve learning what philosophers have said and knowing the different doctrines that have characterized the history of what is called philosophical thought. It could also mean – and this is what Kant probably has in mind – learning from a handbook of metaphysics what is to be understood by entity, by substance, by accident or what is to be understood by God, soul, existence and so forth. But this kind of learning is, according to Kant, the negation of the very nature of philosophy, which is really such only when it embodies a *free* and *autonomous* thought process and not when it learns notions already structured and organized within a given rational system.

We are therefore dealing here with an aporetic situation: on the one hand, when one tries to learn philosophy as a discipline, one can only learn it in a historical way and therefore, it would seem, in a non-philosophical way; on the other hand, when one tries to learn the more properly philosophical aspect – that is, when one turns to philosophizing – one learns an activity that does not take the form of a specific discipline, that is, that does not imply the acquisition of specific knowledge.

Philosophy, for Kant, unlike scientific disciplines that have a determined content and a specific outline, 'is a mere idea of a possible science', which precisely as an idea of a possible science 'is never given *in concreto*' (A838/B866, Kant 1998: 694).

If this prevents us from learning philosophy, it does not mean, however, as mentioned, that we cannot learn anything that has to do with philosophy. On the contrary, just when he is declaring the impossibility of learning philosophy, Kant maintains that we can instead learn to *philosophize*. It is clear that for Kant learning to philosophize does not mean learning some certain content (i.e. learning something similar to what the non-philosophical sciences can learn). Learning to philosophize means, according to Kant, that one can acquire the tools to do philosophy. These tools, for Kant, are not simply natural gifts but they are acquired 'only through practice and through one's own use of reason' (Kant 2004: 538). Yet, they are by themselves not enough for the exercise of philosophical activity – one has not yet drawn from the deepest and most original

concept of philosophy, that which innervates instead the entire Kantian transcendental enterprise. Someone who is concerned, in her/his interest in reason – and therefore with her/his interest in philosophy – only with the ability in reasoning, and therefore the attention to the logical rules considered in themselves, is a so-called *artist of reason* (*Vernunftkünstler*). As long as one remains at this level, one moves within what Kant calls the scholastic concept of philosophy: ‘the concept of philosophy has been only a scholastic concept, namely that of a system of cognition that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge, thus the logical perfection of cognition’ (A838/B866, Kant 1998: 694).

It is relevant to note that at this level philosophy is *only* a science, that is to say, a knowledge that is characterized by notions that can certainly be learnt and taught, that can therefore be contained in a manual that explains and organizes them, but which is still nothing compared to the concrete exercise of philosophy. Although fundamentally stable and secure, this kind of knowledge (which is basically that of logic and partially of history of philosophy) is nevertheless unable to draw on what constitutes the most proper and irreducible element of philosophy.

The passage from the acquisition of the formal conditions that make it possible to articulate a philosophical discourse to the concrete actualization of that discourse is the passage, for Kant, from a scholastic concept of philosophy to a concept of philosophy that he calls worldly (*Weltbegriff*) or cosmic (*conceptus cosmicus*): ‘From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognitions to the essential ends of human reason’ (A838/B866, Kant 1998: 694). If the aim of the *scholastic concept* is the organic unity of science in the system of *knowledge*, this system finds its further end in what according to Kant are *the final interests of human reason*, that is, in *the destination of humans as citizens of the world*.

For Kant, the philosopher is not simply an artist of reason, since he/she does not only aim at skill – that is, he/she is not only directed to the completeness of knowledge and its systematic organization but also aspires to something that goes beyond the merely cognitive dimension, which Kant calls precisely wisdom (*Weisheit*). This does not mean, however, that wisdom can be achieved independently of science (and therefore completely independent of the possession of those instruments that the *Vernunftkünstler* works to acquire); one would otherwise only become a *misologist*, one who considers science, and therefore rational knowledge, as an obstacle to the attainment of wisdom.

For Kant, the philosopher knows that wisdom can only be achieved through science and that science ‘has an inner, true worth only as organ of wisdom’ (Kant 1992: 539); wisdom, which cannot therefore be reduced to science, to a demonstrative procedure, to a logical-rational inference. That is, differently stated, for philosophy knowledge is a tool in the service of an interest that is no longer confined to a purely and properly cognitive level since it involves the very life of the human being in its entirety.

The difference from the end, according to Kant, makes philosophy and the particular sciences two necessarily different scientific practices. This difference is made explicit by Kant in terms of a different relationship with their specific limitations. According to Kant, in fact, it is not given to non-philosophical scientific disciplines to deal with *the limit* in the same sense in which *the limit* characterizes philosophy: ‘In

mathematics and natural science human reason recognizes limits [*Schranken*] but not boundaries [*Grenzen*]; that is, it indeed recognizes that something lies beyond it to which it can never reach, but not that it would itself at any point ever complete its inner progression' (AA 4: 352, Kant 2004: 104). Whereas mathematics and natural sciences come to their limits (*Schranken*) and every time push them further, philosophy alone makes the experience of its boundaries (*Grenzen*). The distinction is explicitly assessed by Kant in the famous §57 of *Prolegomena*, which is in fact entitled *On Determining the Boundaries (Grenzen) of Pure Reason*: 'Boundaries [*Grenzen*] (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location; limits [*Schranken*] require nothing of the kind but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness' (AA 4: 352, Kant 2004: 103–104).

Limits as *Schranken*, which characterize scientific knowledge, are for Kant 'mere negations that affect a magnitude' and therefore can be continuously moved, taken further than their current position. Scientific knowledge is therefore characterized, Kant posits, by infinite progress. It continuously achieves new results like approaching a horizon, which immediately moves forward within a homogeneous and infinitely expandable territory. Therefore, none of its results can constitute the achievement of completeness or of some definitiveness, but continue to have before them the possibility of extending without end – every limit is the promise of further cognitive conquest.

Limits as *Grenzen*, boundaries, on the other hand, are, so to speak, the *constitutive* limits of a magnitude, beyond which there is something other than what they delimit. They are 'positive concepts of restricted objects' (Kant 1992: 600). It is philosophy, for Kant, that as the activity of reason, is capable of drawing its boundaries, of determining itself in the relationship with its other. In its attempt to determine the limits of possible knowledge, philosophy moves between heterogeneous territories: it must experience a radical dishomogeneity, that is, it must encounter not what is not yet knowable, but what is structurally not knowable. In doing so, its exhaustiveness is fulfilled.

Hence the scandalous privilege that Kant assigns to metaphysics:

For this is an advantage upon which metaphysics alone, among all the possible sciences, can rely with confidence, namely, that it can be completed and brought into a permanent state, since it cannot be further changed and is not susceptible to any augmentation through new discoveries – because here reason has the sources of its cognition not in objects and their intuition (through which reason cannot be taught one thing more), but in itself.

(AA 4: 366, Kant 2004: 117)

This makes philosophy a radically different kind of science than the natural sciences.

This clear difference between philosophy and particular scientific disciplines is decisive for Hegel. At the same time, however, Hegel tries to demonstrate how the work of particular sciences and the work of philosophy are not two entirely separate areas, but are rather different moments of a single process, which is the process of the self-determination of reason.

The difference between philosophy and scientific knowledges

If for Kant the difference between philosophy and scientific knowledges manifests itself in a different relation to the limit, Hegel articulates it through the distinction between two ways of understanding the infinite: the infinite in the form of progress to infinity (which refers to what Hegel calls the infinity of the intellect) and the infinite instead as overcoming the split between finite and infinite (which refers to what Hegel calls the infinite of reason). Infinite progress is precisely a continuous overcoming of the limit that in overcoming a given limit always posits another one, in a process that continues indefinitely. This is exactly what happens in the logic of scientific development that is proper to the non-philosophical sciences, where each discovery, each new explanation, moves the frontier of what must be known further and further away, in an endless progress. The infinite of reason, on the other hand, is for Hegel what articulates the finite and the infinite as moments of a process in which the determinations (the finite and the infinite) have no meaning outside the relation that constitutes them. Furthermore, this is the knowledge that embodies, according to Hegel, philosophy, which in fact, unlike particular scientific knowledge, does not have the form of a straight line, where each point is always a point beyond the point that precedes it, but of the circle: 'As true infinite, bent back upon itself, its image becomes the *circle*, the line that has reached itself, closed and wholly present, without *beginning* and *end*' (SL, 119).⁵

The difference between philosophy and particular scientific knowledges, however, is discussed in more explicit terms in the introductory paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. Here, Hegel proposes an introductory anticipation of the concept of philosophy. These paragraphs pose many problems for the interpreter.⁶ In fact, it is as if philosophy was shown in presuppositional terms, outside of its exercise, somehow before it actually actualized itself, and thus separated from that one ground – the development and justification of concepts – in which it is actually itself. It is as if Hegel, in these paragraphs, was moving in a sort of borderland between the non-philosophical and the philosophical, between common sense and science, as if to indicate to the subject who has not yet decided for philosophy the general characteristics of philosophy itself. In doing this work – that is, in introducing the nature of the work that philosophy is called upon to do – it is as if Hegel found himself forced to anticipate what is not properly foreseeable, revealing at first what only systematic articulation can show in its full justification. It is therefore an extremely problematic place because here Hegel finds himself having to carry out, anticipating and assuming what is not yet justified, an operation that is in many ways anti-philosophical, as any introduction to philosophy is anti-philosophical, according to Hegel. Hegel denies the possibility of an introduction to philosophy, since this implies the assumption of philosophy as something already given. On the other hand, he seems in these paragraphs to accept the need to go through this impossibility to be able to show in what sense and according to what coordinates the epistemological structure of philosophical discourse differs from the epistemological structure of other discursive forms that are similar to it and with which, however, it should not be confused. Precisely because it moves on the borderline that separates non-philosophy from philosophy, these paragraphs

(EL, §§1–18) constitute a sort of metaphilosophical reflection that necessarily and problematically anticipates what philosophy can reveal only through its concrete development.

In this problematic anticipation of philosophy, the first operation that Hegel carries out is the clarification of the distinction between the way of being of philosophy and the way of being of what are generically called by Hegel *the other sciences* and of *religion*.

With regard to the relationship between philosophical science and other sciences – which is what is of interest in this context – it should first of all be stressed that, for Hegel, it is a relationship entirely within the conceptual dimension of science, which means, more decisively, that it is a relationship between different levels of scientificity, of which – here is one of the scandalously *untimely* elements of Hegelian thought – the highest is that of philosophy and the ‘weaker’ one, because it is not characterized by the same degree of radicality, is instead that of the non-philosophical sciences. In saying that philosophy is science in a more radical sense compared to the other forms of knowledge, however, there is in Hegel neither an eliminationist intent compared to other sciences, as if they were absorbed by a sort of philosophical superscience, nor an epistemologically invalidating intent, as if they were reduced to insufficient and not really scientific practices, that is, to mere data retrieval activities without any authentically conceptual contribution. On the contrary, the non-philosophical sciences perform a fundamental task, according to Hegel, for the establishment of philosophical science.

However, what is first to be asked is through which arguments Hegel can attribute the concept of science to philosophy in a more radical sense than is possible in relation to those that are usually assumed, within the ordinary discursive horizon, as the sciences ‘in the proper sense’.

In §1 of the ‘Introduction’ to the *Encyclopedia*, after stating that philosophy cannot afford the privilege enjoyed by other forms of science to be able to presuppose its objects as immediately given by representation, Hegel observes that philosophy, because it cannot enjoy such a privilege, cannot do without the presupposition: ‘Philosophy thus may definitely presuppose a *familiarity* with its objects – indeed it must [*muß*] do so – as well as an interest in them from the outset, if only because chronologically speaking consciousness produces for itself *representations* of objects prior to generating *concepts* of them’ (EL, §1).⁷ Precisely because representation (*Vorstellung*) comes genetically prior to concept, it is only by working on these representations that one can move towards the transcendence of representation itself and thus go in the direction of conceptual justification and of what is originally (i.e. logically and ontologically) prior to representation. Therefore, if it is true that philosophy is the removal of the representative presupposition, this form of presupposition constitutes at the same time the condition of possibility, at least on an epistemological level, for the development of philosophical discourse proper.

However, a problem immediately arises: if philosophy is not only not free from the presupposition but also seems to make the presupposition here a necessary element for its own development – since it is only through representations and working on them that spirit is able to progress to the concept – how is the difference between

philosophy and other forms of scientific knowledge concretely articulated, since in the first instance this difference seems to be based on the absence of the presupposition for philosophy and the necessity instead of the presupposition for the non-philosophical sciences?

The point has to do with a different relationship with the presupposition. Philosophy sublates (*hebt auf*) the presupposition from its presuppositional form precisely because it considers it *as* a presupposition. Thinking of it as a presupposition means in fact not considering it as something already given, already assumed and already accepted, but as something that needs to be made explicit, criticized and therefore shown in its consistency or inconsistency, in its necessity or arbitrariness through a purely conceptual procedure.⁸ The Hegelian argument seems to follow in many ways the Platonic model presented in Book VII of the *Republic*. For Plato, only dialectics, and therefore philosophy, is able to go beyond *hypotheses*, and the way the philosopher effects this passage is by considering them, the hypotheses, for what they really are, that is, as something that needs further justification. Philosophy is, according to Hegel, that form of knowledge which, considering the presupposition as a presupposition, sublates it from its founding role and places it within a process of justification that transforms it into something other than a mere presupposition. The representative presuppositions are, to use Plato's words once again, 'trampolines and springboards – to reach what is free from the hypothesis at the beginning of the whole'; that is, the presuppositions constitute the sphere from which it is necessary to start to arrive, through the critical activity that constitutes the first and essential movement of justification, at the self-founded concept.⁹

In this sense, the difference between philosophy and other forms of knowledge seems to be played out, in the Hegelian perspective, not so much in terms of the presence or absence of the presupposition, but rather in terms of a different way of relating to it; in other words, the issue is still whether or not it is necessary to question it *as* a presupposition. What specifically characterizes philosophical activity is the recognition of the presuppositional nature of the given and in this recognition the beginning of a movement that is aimed at removing and overcoming the presupposition itself. The openness to the awareness of the representative precomprehension within which it moves, therefore, is an act that is constitutive of the very possibility of philosophy. This openness, however, does not take concrete form in a silent and uncritical awareness of the necessity of the presupposition or even in the sad recognition of the conditioned being of any discourse, but rather in the determination to move in the direction of the crumbling of the mere acceptance of assumptions and therefore of the criticism of the elements of presupposition that make representative thought as such.

From experience to philosophy

Although philosophy cannot accept any element as a given, this does not imply that it moves outside of reality, in a sort of realm of pure abstraction, and that instead reality in its concrete articulation is left as the exclusive competence of the particular sciences.

What philosophy develops its discourse around is, according to Hegel, nothing more than the world; he explicitly says: 'its content is actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)' (EL, §6).¹⁰

Now, to say that philosophy has the world as its own content means, in very general terms, also to recognize that experience is in any case the starting point of philosophy, although philosophy as a reflecting activity presents itself first of all as a negative relationship with experience, that is, as a criticism of any foundation in the immediate datum. Philosophy is, for Hegel, an activity that arises from experience to account for experience, without considering experience as a foundation. This means that philosophy is not, according to Hegel, the mere construction of an *a priori* system that can deduce experience and the world. Indeed, with respect to an idea of this type, with respect to this formalistic and abstract image of philosophy, Hegel argues that 'philosophy owes its initial origin to experience (the *aposteriori*)' or 'philosophy owes its *development* to experience' (EL, §12 R).

To underline the genesis of philosophy from experience and the link it has with the experiential sphere in relation to its development does not mean that philosophy finds its foundation and justification in experience. In accounting for experience, philosophy denies the claimed truth value of the experiential datum in its pure immediacy. But the denial of this immediacy should not be identified with the removal of the data in favour of an *a priori* scheme that would disregard any reference to experience. The *a priori* (if ever it makes sense to speak of a *a priori* in Hegel's philosophy)¹¹ is not in Hegel something separate from the *a posteriori*. The *a priori* is, if anything, the process of gradual conceptual justification of that world of experience which constitutes the starting point of the cognitive endeavour and of the need for philosophy. If one wants to talk about a *a priori* in the philosophy of Hegel, it should be understood neither in the sense of Kantian transcendentalism nor in general in that of pre-Kantian rationalist metaphysics. In the first case, *a priori* would qualify either the categorical structure of the knowing subject; in the second sense, it would refer to a metaphysical structure of the world presupposed to the concrete being of it. Both structures, both that of transcendentalism and that of rationalist metaphysics, would in fact, according to Hegel, be structures that thought would find as already given and that therefore would not express the free development of thought by itself. For Hegel, what can be said *a priori* is a process of justification of experience that is not based on experience itself, even though it takes it as its point of departure.

In the gradual process of logical justification of experience and therefore in the passage from the presuppositional dimension to the conceptual, a fundamental role is played, according to Hegel, by the non-philosophical sciences.

For Hegel, the non-philosophical sciences are not merely an activity of recording and cataloguing empirical material:¹² 'empirical sciences do not stand still with the perception of the details of the appearances; instead, by thinking, they have readied this material for philosophy by discovering its universal determinations, genera, and laws. In this way, they prepare this particularized content so that it can be taken up into philosophy' (EL, §12). It is therefore clear from this paragraph that for Hegel non-philosophical sciences constitute the first denial of the immediacy of the data and thus the first essential step in the direction of the rational justification of experience; the

non-philosophical sciences, moreover, in this work of justification, force philosophy always to return to the concrete determinations of reality that an abstract formalism would tend to consider as extraneous to the discourse of philosophy because they are contingent and *a posteriori*.

In this sense, even though philosophy cannot be assimilated to the specific way of being of the particular sciences, it presents itself within a relationship of evident continuity with the work they produce: 'The process of taking up this content, in which thinking sublates its mere givenness and the immediacy that still clings to it, is at the same time a process of thinking *developing* out of itself' (EL, §12 R). To the extent that the process of philosophy is a process of progressive and constant denial of the authoritative value of immediacy, in favour of a justification that cannot appeal to anything given, the work of the sciences, which identifies the universal in the particular and seeks a legality of experience, is an essential first step in this direction.

Furthermore, while philosophy owes its own development to this extraordinary effort to organize reality that is operated by non-philosophical sciences, it is also called upon to remove those elements of immediacy and presupposition that still, necessarily, characterize the sciences as such.

Philosophy, according to Hegel, by discussing the elements of presupposition that mark scientific practices, develops an action of this sort:

it bestows upon their contents the most essential shape of the *freedom* of thought (i.e., the shape of the *a priori*) and, instead of relying on the testimony of their findings and the experienced fact, provides their contents with the *corroboration of being necessary*, such that the fact becomes the depiction and the replication of the original and completely independent activity of thinking.

(EL, §12 R)

To claim that philosophy provides the *essential shape of freedom* to the non-philosophical sciences means precisely that philosophy, on the one hand, *recognizes* the work of these sciences and, on the other, does not passively confront their results, but tends to justify them in a purely conceptual way. In carrying out this activity, philosophy moves the decisive step in the direction of that conquest of the autonomy of reason with respect to authoritative principles external to it that still affect the work of the non-philosophical sciences.

Philosophical science, therefore, in Hegel's perspective, is neither a replacement nor an alternative to non-philosophical sciences. That is, philosophy has in Hegel neither a revisionist intent with respect to the concrete progress of the non-philosophical sciences nor does it compete with them. Likewise, philosophy has no prescriptive function with respect to the non-philosophical sciences.

The relationship of philosophy with the sciences is, rather, played out within a double directionality:

1. On the one hand, philosophy owes its first conceptualization of reality to the non-philosophical sciences.

2. On the other hand, it acts on what in the non-philosophical sciences goes beyond themselves, that is, on the elements that the non-philosophical sciences *must* assume in the form of the presupposition, producing a conceptual justification of what presents itself to them in the form of the given.

What is problematic in Hegel is that this purely conceptual justification – what he calls the form of freedom – is independent of experience and at the same time cannot move against experience:

Since philosophy differs only in form from the other ways of becoming conscious of this content that is one and the same, its agreement with actuality and experience is a necessity. Indeed, this agreement may be regarded as at least an external measure of the truth of a philosophy, just as it is to be viewed as the highest goal of the philosophical science to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that *exists*, or with actuality, through the knowledge of this agreement.

(EL, §6)

It seems that on the one hand Hegel wants to recognize the truth of experience and on the other he shows this truth to be outside of experience itself. But that is exactly Hegel's point. The truth of experience cannot find its foundation in experiential data, but only in the concept that founds the very possibility of experience. In more explicit terms: according to Hegel, we do not have, on the one hand, data, experience and non-philosophical sciences and, on the other hand, a conceptual consideration, that is a philosophy that proceeds completely independently of data, experience and science. The non-philosophical sciences, even the empirical ones, are never, according to Hegel, simply empirical. The non-philosophical sciences are instead a first essential work of rational justification of data and experience. That is, they are the first step in the direction of the freedom that philosophy is called to bring to its realization by freeing the sciences from the residues of presuppositionality that still restrict them.

To say that philosophy must agree with our experience of reality, that philosophy cannot, so to speak, contradict reality and if anything – as Hegel claims – must make room for contradiction precisely to account for reality, does not mean that experience is the element on which philosophical discourse is based. Philosophy must justify the data of experience in purely conceptual terms. But conceptual justification, precisely because it is a rational understanding of the world and must therefore account for the world in its being what it is, cannot fail to agree with our experience of the world or in any case is called upon to account for the ways in which humans experience the world. For Hegel, therefore, the rational comprehension of reality is neither the construction of a coherent world with given logical-rational structures nor, therefore, an operation of superimposition on reality by the subject of a logical-conceptual network elaborated outside of reality and through which reality would thus be made rational. The rational comprehension of the world that philosophy must take charge of, therefore, moves first of all from the recognition of pre-scientific experience (the experience that

humans make of the world), then from the recognition of the categorization and justification of pre-scientific experience made by the non-philosophical sciences. The non-philosophical sciences are a form of organization of reality, in which the work of thought is already at work as an activity of criticism and overcoming mere immediacy. This is precisely what makes the non-philosophical sciences cognitive enterprises that are already moving in the direction of a knowledge based on the autonomy of reason, that is, on the idea that reason is not founded in something other than itself. In carrying out this work and to be able to make continuous progress – that is, to continuously increase knowledge in relation to the fields to which they are addressed – the non-philosophical sciences cannot but take as given and presupposed, both the field that constitutes them and the logic of the discourse that allows them to proceed. Philosophy, as a science characterized by the impossibility of accepting assumptions and affirmations, is precisely the critical discussion and conceptual articulation of these assumptions and therefore the realization based on the autonomy of reason of that work of comprehension that has in the pre-scientific experience and in the rational justification produced by the non-philosophical sciences its fundamental genetic preconditions.

Conclusion

Strictly speaking, there is therefore no clear separation in Hegel between knowledge that is *a posteriori* and that which is *a priori*. It is for this very reason that Hegel's position can be thought of neither as a sort of *apriorism* nor as a sort of *aposteriorism*.¹³ For Hegel, the process of knowledge is a process of conceptual justification and as such is the progressive liberation of the *a posteriori* from the constraints that make it other than reason. This is a process that is already carried out by prescientific experience, which in the very moment in which it addresses the world gives it a structure, then decisively by the non-philosophical sciences which are a decisive categorical structuring of experience and, through the laws they elaborate, its universalization. Therefore, in the final instance and on a different level from that in which the non-philosophical sciences operate, philosophy's task is to justify in purely conceptual terms the universal produced by the non-philosophical sciences. To do that, philosophy, according to Hegel, has to discuss the assumptions that characterize both the pre-scientific experience of the world and its categorization by non-philosophical sciences. In taking away these presuppositions, what philosophy must take away is the idea that the thought that thinks and understands the world is something merely subjective, something with which the knowing subject grasps and makes the world his own, as if this activity would make the world something subjective. What philosophy according to Hegel has to show is that thought is not simply a property of the thinking subject but also the *logos* within which both the subject and the world are, and which takes shape and consistency only in the relationship that subjects establish with each other and with the world.

Philosophy is therefore science, for Hegel, but in a different sense from the way the non-philosophical sciences are. This does not mean, however, as has been pointed out,

that philosophy is a competitor or alternative cognitive practice to that of the non-philosophical sciences. Philosophy and non-philosophical sciences work on different levels of explanation even if they are connected. The non-philosophical sciences constitute a first level of rational organization of the world that allows philosophy to work not on the singularity and the contingent, but on the universal determinations that are precisely produced by the non-philosophical sciences. In turn, philosophy works on the element that the non-philosophical sciences in their concrete practice (i.e. in their specific way of being) tend to assume as a presupposition, as a given, as a starting point that does not need further questioning. There is a further question that philosophy, on the other hand, considers necessary and which indeed defines it as what it is. This means that, although philosophy and non-philosophical sciences are necessarily in continuity with each other, what defines philosophy in its own way of being, that is, as science, is that it is never fully comparable to the way of being of the particular non-philosophical sciences, not because philosophy is opposed to the non-philosophical sciences or claims to replace them, but because its work sets itself on a different level from theirs.

According to Williamson's approach, Hegel is an *exceptionalist*. For Hegel philosophy is not a discipline like any other. This does not imply, however, that philosophy is in a Heideggerian sense something outside the horizon of science. For Hegel, philosophy is science, but it is so in a different way from that which characterizes the particular sciences. What distinguishes philosophy from the non-philosophical sciences is a difference in the level of radicality of the experience of freedom that philosophy embodies compared to the non-philosophical sciences. Both the non-philosophical sciences and philosophy, as they work towards the autonomy of reason, are experiences of freedom, that is, liberation from dependence on immediacy and justification based exclusively on reason. What makes the experience of freedom embodied by philosophy more radical, according to Hegel, is that it cannot depend on anything but its own development and is therefore forced to account for those elements that the non-philosophical sciences can instead assume as given.

A radical experience of freedom, that of philosophy, then, involves the rejection of any external authoritative foundation to the rational process, be it an objective foundation – an authority to which the subject must adapt and bend independently of the process of justification that is able to activate – or be it something subjective – that set of desires, needs, pressures, values or ideologies that push the subject to bend reality so as to be consistent with it. An experience of freedom, that of philosophy, which only because it is open to the unexpectedness and friction of reality, is also open to its intrinsic truth.

Notes

- 1 The English version of the text translates 'Kenntnis' with 'Information'. I prefer to stick to the more literal translation of 'Kenntnis' with 'Knowledge'.
- 2 The entire path of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is testimony to this process of dismissal of what it claims to be worth as a founding structure outside the very development of thought.

- 3 There has often been talk, in reference to Hegel, of an anti-foundationalist or non-fundamentalist conception of philosophy. The self-founding model of knowing proposed by Hegel, presupposes a radical critique of what can be considered as the classical foundationalist attitude, according to which knowledge should be based on certain fundamental beliefs, which, however, are not in turn founded by other beliefs. According to Hegel, when knowledge is based on assumptions that are not themselves justified, that knowledge is conditioned from the outside, by something that it does not account for, but assumes as a given. For Hegel, the foundationalist attitude is the typical attitude within which modern thought moves, which presupposes that there is a perceiving and thinking subject who tries to capture in some way an object that is outside of him. In such a dualistic vision there must be a foundation on which to build the transition from one to the other, from subject to object or from object to subject. In this sense, the criticism of the foundational structure is in Hegel a criticism of the model of knowledge that generates it. For a reading of Hegel in an anti-foundationalist sense, cf. Winfield (1989) and Maker (1994). For a presentation, analysis and critical reading of the anti-foundationalist perspective, see Corti (2017).
- 4 That the Hegelian position is not describable in classical idealistic terms has been highlighted by Stern (2009).
- 5 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 6 See Fulda (1984), Lucas (1991), Nuzzo (2010), Sell (2010) and Stern (2017).
- 7 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
- 8 This kind of movement is exemplified and developed in a systematic way into the dialectic of 'Setzen' and 'Voraussetzen' at the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence in the *Science of Logic*.
- 9 Cf. Plato, *Resp.*, VI, 510c–511b (Plato 1991: 190–191).
- 10 On the Hegelian concept of *Wirklichkeit*, see the various contributions in Illetterati and Menegoni (2018).
- 11 On the inadequacy of the notions of *a priori* and *a posteriori* in order to think Hegel's philosophy, see Rand (2007, 2017).
- 12 In this regard, it would be necessary to distinguish, even within the non-philosophical sciences, between different models of science. In the remark to §16 of EL, Hegel distinguishes between (a) sciences that have only the name 'but are in reality a mere collection of data' and therefore have the form of mere arrangements; (b) 'those based on mere caprice' (such as, for instance, heraldry); sciences of the latter sort are positive through and through (where what is to be emphasized is that the positive character is given by the pure being place of these sciences, i.e. by their artificiality); and (c) positive but rational sciences, namely that have a rational basis and starting-point. These sciences (c) have in common with philosophy the rational element but are separated from it precisely because of the positive element, that is to say, because of the assumption of their object as something that is presupposed. On this issue, cf. Mooren and Rojek (2015: esp. 86–89).
- 13 The issue was discussed mainly with reference to the relationship between logic and philosophy of nature. While according to some interpreters the articulation of the philosophy of nature constitutes a sort of deduction from logical categoriality, others have shown that the philosophy of nature is instead characterized by its own autonomy, which derives from the recognition of nature as an idea in the form of exteriority, and that therefore its determinations are not mere deductions of

the thought determinations of logic. An aprioristic interpretation is sustained by Stone (2005). Against this interpretation Burbidge (2007) and Rand (2017). Stone subsequently changed his position on this very point. See Stone (2018).

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The Metaphilosophical Implications of Hegel's Conception of Absolute Idealism as the True Philosophy

Héctor Ferreiro

Hegel's constructivist approach to philosophy: The history of philosophy and the philosophy of spirit

In the remark to the final paragraph of the chapter on 'Existence' (*Dasein*) in the *Logic* of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Hegel states that the 'ideality of the finite is the chief proposition of philosophy' and that 'every true philosophy is for that reason idealism' (EL,¹ §95 R; ENZ, §95 Anm.). At the end of the chapter on 'Existence' in the *Science of Logic* (1832) Hegel claims, further, that 'every philosophy is essentially idealism or at least has idealism for its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is carried out' (SL, 124; WdL, GW21, 142). Along this line, Hegel conceives of absolute idealism not only as the result of the entire history of philosophy but also as the philosophical system that reveals, by developing it and formulating it adequately, what the precedent philosophies, mostly unknowingly, tried to develop and formulate, namely a general theory about reality based on the principle of the unity of being and thought. According to Hegel, every particular philosophy throughout history expounded in a successive, partial and complementary way the process of identification of being and thought; inasmuch as the system of absolute idealism assumes the latently idealist theses present in former philosophies, it makes those theses explicit and expounds as its own internal development the process of the identification of being and thought. Thus, absolute idealism is, for Hegel, the philosophy that shows what philosophy is actually about.

It is not by chance that Hegel explicitly mentions idealism in the context of his exposition of the category of 'existence' (or 'being-determinate'). If the most basic ontological category is 'something' (*Etwas*) – as it was arguably the case, for example, in Kant's philosophy² – existence has still to be added to that *possible* something so that it actually exists. In this framework, existence is as such the other of the determinate content that the knowing subject knows, that is, the other of *determinacy* (*Bestimmtheit*). Hegel, on the contrary, claims that being becomes *itself*

being-determinate and, further, the existing determinate thing (*Daseiendes*) (EL §90; ENZ §90; SL, 88–90; WdL, GW21, 102–103; see also WdL, GW11, 65–66). But, for Hegel, the unity between being and determinacy entails the unity between *thought* and the existing things in general. Thought conceives of itself as different from *each* particular existing thing; thus, it tends to conceive the identity of thought with itself, that is, the thinking I, as an existing 'thing' amongst others. But there is no difference between thought when it conceives of itself as pure thought, without any determinate content, and being considered as pure being, without consideration of any determinate being. In such a case, thought and being are identical with each other. Although, according to Hegel, pure being is also the *same* as pure nothing, being as such and non-being as such purport to be the *opposite* of each other. This internal contrariness of each of them – each is itself *and* its opposite – leads to the sublation of their alleged complete difference: being turns into being with non-being *in itself*, that is to say, it turns into being-determinate. At the beginning of the chapter on 'Existence' in the *Greater Logic*, Hegel states that 'determinateness has *yet* to detach itself from being; nor will it *ever* detach itself from it, *since* the now underlying truth is the *unity* of non-being with being; *all* further determinations will transpire on this basis' (SL, 85; WdL, GW21, 98; my emphasis). Since pure being is identical with pure thought, when being turns into being-determinate and then into 'all further determinations', thought does so *too*. The unity between being and thought, between being and what there is, and therefore, between thought and what there is, existed from the outset of Hegel's *Logic*.³ Absolute idealism is the philosophical system that makes explicit and develops that unity.

Now, the unity between *being*, what there *is* and *thought* is the main claim of *constructivism*, namely that since the generation of things out of being is in point of fact their generation out of thinking, things are in truth what human thought produces by its activity. To delimit the epistemic specificity of philosophy with respect to the epistemic specificity of the other sciences it is not unusual to appeal to the alleged holistic character of philosophy (Moore 1953: 1–27; Sellars 1991: 1–5; Rescher 2017: 32–43). However, the aspiration to totality is also shared by the natural sciences; indeed, natural sciences as a whole also aim to give an answer to highly universal questions such as, for example, the origin of the universe, the constitution of matter or the formation of consciousness. For Hegel, however, the specific characteristic of philosophy is much less its holism than its constructivism (Westphal 1989: 140–148, 180; 2003: 53; Beiser 2002: 581–582; 2005: 80–109; Brandom 2019: 180–192, 216–231, 422–432, 487–499, 610–620, 707–712). Since the theory of being and the theory of knowledge are sub-disciplines of philosophy, it is philosophy that is the only type of knowledge that is capable through its own activity of both grounding and making explicit the intrinsic unity between what there is and how we know it. In this framework, holism is only a corollary of constructivism. With the exception of philosophy, all disciplines assume their starting points. What defines each science as such and such a particular science is to analyse a specific domain of objects, not to reflect on the relation between the nature of those objects and the way our mind knows them. Since the theories of being and of knowing in general, that is, ontology and epistemology, have been traditionally considered as sub-disciplines of philosophy, only philosophy

examines how being and knowing relate to each other. Although the field of objects analysed by other sciences can eventually be very extensive, it never includes the relation between the constitution of their objects and the knowledge of those objects by the subject. This is what, according to Hegel, characterizes philosophical thought. Within philosophy, Hegel criticizes realistic monism – whose most sophisticated version in Hegel's time was Spinoza's philosophy – precisely because he considers that realism is not capable to give a plausible account of the relation and unity between being and knowing, that is to say, in Spinoza's own words, between extension and thought (VGP III, 250).

Hegel claims that all philosophies are actually variants of idealism and that their difference lies therefore in the extent to which idealism has been made explicit in each of them. Absolute idealism is the philosophy in which idealism becomes completely manifest. Since in absolute idealism philosophy itself finally becomes aware of its own nature, absolute idealism is the consummation of philosophy. The intuitively more plausible way to understand what absolute idealism is *qua* consummation of philosophy seems to be by reconstructing its genesis through the *history* of philosophy. Although to understand Hegel's conception of absolute idealism it is indispensable to examine his own interpretation of the history of philosophy,⁴ the successive philosophical systems are *already* realizations of the 'concept' (i.e. the specific nature) of philosophy. Thus, the genesis or, in other words, the deduction of that concept does *not* take place in the history of philosophy, but it is presupposed by that history. Why and how human beings come to philosophize and, on that basis, what philosophy in general is amongst the other human activities – and, ultimately, along these same lines, what is it exactly that human beings are attempting to reach by developing philosophical systems – cannot be, therefore, reconstructed only by means of an analysis of Hegel's reflection on philosophy as the end form of absolute spirit, but rather through an examination of – at least – his entire philosophy of spirit. The philosophy of subjective spirit, of objective spirit and of the forms of absolute spirit previous to philosophy itself are, in fact, the *nervus probandi* of the deduction of the 'concept' of philosophy.

In Hegel's system, the philosophy of spirit provides the argumentation that philosophy is the final form of the process of self-knowledge of the human mind in the sense that philosophy reveals the essence of the mind – and of what the mind knows – in a more precise and explicit way than any other activity.⁵ In the beginning of the *Philosophy of Spirit* Hegel presents the concept of spirit in its most simple and abstract form (EPM,⁶ §§381–384; ENZ §§381–384; VSG, 9–18 [§§299–303], 149–206, 555–575); it is along the philosophy of *subjective* spirit where Hegel unfolds the determinations of that concept. Indeed, subjective spirit is spirit in its concept or, what amounts to the same, it is the *concrete* concept of spirit (EL §385; ENZ §385; VSG, 18–19 [§304], 22–24 [§307], 207–210, 578–592). Thus, subjective spirit as the concrete concept of spirit contains a programme about the nature and development of *philosophy*. To elucidate: philosophy is, for Hegel, the most accomplished achievement of the human mind; the concept of mind is expounded throughout the philosophy of subjective spirit; thus, to understand what philosophy means for Hegel it is crucial to understand first what, according to him, constitutes the human mind as such.

The last form of subjective spirit, that is, spirit proper or spirit as such, expounds in detail what defines the mind. Since spirit proper is theoretical as well as practical, free spirit as the end form of spirit proper is the *unity* of theoretical and practical spirit. Precisely because it is the unity of intelligence and will, Hegel characterizes free spirit as the 'concept of *absolute spirit*' (EPM, §482; ENZ, §482). Free spirit is the human mind when it finally understands itself according to its own nature and, for that reason, becomes *from then on* able to *act* accordingly to that nature. Along this line, in the final paragraph on free spirit in the *Encyclopaedia* of 1830 Hegel inserts a remark in which he states that objective spirit and absolute spirit are the 'objectivity' (*Gegenständlichkeit*) and the 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*) of free spirit (EPM, §482 R; ENZ §482 Anm.). This means, in other words, that objective spirit and absolute spirit are the realization of the full-blown concept or essence of the human mind. Hegel's conception of spirit in its successive forms – theoretical, practical and free spirit – is, therefore, the condition of possibility for understanding the structure and meaning of the rest of his philosophy of spirit and, in this context, to understand what defines, according to him, philosophy as the most accomplished realization and manifestation of the human mind (Nuzzo 2016: 21, 24).

The alleged paradoxical structure of Hegel's philosophy of spirit

In the order of exposition of the philosophy of spirit as such, that is, in the section 'Psychology', intelligence precedes will; will arises at the end of the process of intelligence. On the other hand, however, Hegel presents objective spirit as the continuation of the process of subjective *will* (in fact, until the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel places in the beginning of the philosophy of *objective* spirit the passages that in the third edition become free spirit as the final form of subjective spirit), while he explicitly organizes the different forms of absolute spirit – art, religion and philosophy – according to the formal structure of *theoretical* spirit – intuition, representation and thought. For the same reason that in the stage of subjective spirit theoretical spirit precedes practical spirit, it seems in the stage of the realization of free spirit that absolute spirit should precede objective spirit. It is a fact, however, that Hegel considers art, religion and philosophy as subsequent and superior with respect to the forms of objective spirit. More clearly, in the realm of subjective spirit intelligence precedes will, which derives from the culmination of intelligence; it seems that same hierarchy between intelligence and will should repeat symmetrically in the following general stage of the realization of free spirit. But Hegel follows in the latter case an (apparently) opposite logic: the forms of absolute spirit as realizations of free spirit as cognition come *after* the forms of objective spirit as realizations of free spirit as action. This 'inversion' has been noted by Hegel scholars such as, for example, Adriaan Peperzak and Edith Düsing. Peperzak and Düsing speak in this respect of a 'primacy' of the intelligence over the will in Hegel's philosophy of spirit (Peperzak 1987: 38–57; Düsing 1991: 119–133). But to characterize placing absolute spirit after objective spirit as an alleged 'primacy' of the intelligence over the will does not provide any explanation of that particular disposition in terms of Hegel's own system.

Objective spirit and absolute spirit are not, respectively, the realization of practical and theoretical spirit, but *both* are realizations of *free spirit*, which is, as Hegel explicitly states, the *unity* of theoretical and practical spirit. Thus, since free spirit is neither mere intelligence nor mere will, objective spirit and absolute spirit are not the realization of practical spirit, on the one hand, and the realization of theoretical spirit, on the other. The conception of objective and absolute spirit as ‘inverse’ forms of manifestation of the nature of the human spirit relies on a mistaken interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of spirit. This erroneous interpretation consists, more precisely, in considering that for Hegel intelligence ‘internalizes’ the objects of the external world, while the will ‘externalizes’ the internal goals of the knowing subject (Fetscher 1970: 142–143, 189; Peperzak 1987: 43–44; 1990: 287, 302–305; 1991a: 366; 1991b: 22–23, 63, 104; deVries 1988: 199; Düsing 1991: 126; Murray 1991: 54–55; Stederoth 2001: 383–384; Rometsch 2007: 229–232). However, there are at least three sound arguments that prove that in the case of Hegel’s system this way of conceiving the difference between intelligence and will is fundamentally wrong.

The first objection against conceiving the activity of the will as the externalization of internal goals is that in the exposition of the philosophy of subjective practical spirit Hegel does *not* develop the activity of the will in that way, but as the *universalizing* of the spontaneous self-determinations of the mind, that is to say, as the sublating of the immediacy of the feelings, drives and inclinations of the spirit and as the sublating of the particularity of the abstractly formal capacity to choose them (Hösle 1988: 394; Ferreira 2019: 81–88).

The second objection is that such a conception equates ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) with ‘consciousness’ (*Bewusstsein*). Internalizing and externalizing contents are activities of the human subject that has not *yet* become aware that objects are not things of an external world, but its *own* determinations. Through the phenomenological process of consciousness the knowing subject sublates the abstract difference between itself as a merely inner realm and the contents of knowledge as the realm of merely external things. Precisely this sublation turns consciousness into spirit as such. Hegel can thus claim that, unlike consciousness, spirit as such faces the determinate contents of the so-called external world with the certainty that they are ‘flesh of his flesh’ (VSG, 118, 798, 1084 [§440]). The process of theoretical spirit consists in showing that object and subject do not oppose each other in an abstract way. In the first theoretical form of spirit as such, that is, in feeling and intuition, the mind is still sunk in objectivity, while in the general form of representation it opposes an inner content to the external content of intuition – the process of representation consists precisely in sublating that opposition (EPM, §451; ENZ §451; VSG, 822–825). The last form of theoretical spirit, that is to say, thought or comprehending, reveals the deficiency of the abstract differentiation and opposition between the intuited external thing and the internally represented content. When the mind comprehends objects, it operates at a level that is neither merely objective nor merely subjective, but a unity of both, since object and subject no longer relate only to themselves, but have become ‘forms’ of determinacy as such, that is to say, purely formal aspects or moments of the determinate content that is in each case known. Thus, what is overcome in the transition from consciousness to spirit is not the – as such irreducible – difference between the knowing subject and

the things external to her/his body. Hegel does not deny that there is a world different from the subject that knows it. What is sublated in that transition is, strictly speaking, the conception that knowing is an 'internal' realm, outside which there are the things that are known, things that are accordingly conceived as 'external'. However, things are external to each other, but they are not external to knowing, because knowing is not itself a thing. For knowing things are not 'things' either, but determinate contents or objects of knowledge, that is, determinations of the activity itself of knowing. Once the spatializing approach to knowing and what knowing knows has been superseded, an abstract differentiation between 'outer' things and 'inner' contents becomes meaningless; accordingly, the interpretation of theoretical activity as the internalizing of alleged external objects and of practical activity as the externalization of alleged inner goals becomes meaningless too.

The third objection against construing theoretical activity as the process of internalizing the real things that the intelligence knows and practical activity as the complementary process of externalizing the contents of the subject, is that Hegel conceives of *art* as a form of *absolute* spirit. Buildings, monuments, sculptures, paintings, musical compositions and theatre representations are certainly 'things' of the real world. It is therefore evident that externality is not the criterion with which Hegel distinguishes objective spirit from absolute spirit. The externality of things made by human beings with respect to their own bodies does not imply as such that those things should be, for that reason, considered as the result of the activity of the will by contrast to the supposedly merely inner objects of intelligence; otherwise, Hegel would not consider artworks – as he in fact does – as instances of absolute spirit, but as instances of *objective* spirit. On the other side, private property or contracts, which are for Hegel figures of objective spirit, are not external things either, although what someone owns as property can eventually be a spatial thing and a contract can be written on paper. This shows that for Hegel the 'objectivity' of objective spirit does not bear any relation to an alleged externalization of internal contents nor the 'subjectivity' of subjective spirit bear any relation to an alleged internalization of external things. Besides, since Hegel correlates the different forms of absolute spirit with the cognitive forms of intuition, representation and thought, its 'absoluteness' becomes in this particular approach highly problematic. Indeed, there is in this framework nothing left but to suppose – as Peperzak and Düsing did – a mysterious 'primacy' of the intelligence over the will in Hegel's philosophy of spirit.

The objectivity of objective spirit

As stated above, it is essential to understand the meaning of Hegel's theory of spirit as the last form of subjective spirit to understand the difference between objective and absolute spirit as realizations of free spirit and, further, to understand Hegel's conception of philosophy as the end form of absolute spirit. Let us begin with Hegel's theory of subjective theoretical spirit: knowing spontaneously conceives of itself as an entirely formal or empty activity, as a 'tabula rasa' or a 'white paper', thus, as an activity that is not a true *activity*, but rather a mere mirroring of objects that consequently

present themselves as the only actually existing things. Since knowing conceives of itself as indeterminate, that is, as 'ideal', the thing that knowing knows is, since it is determinate *in itself* and for that very reason 'real', what *actively* determines knowing. As indeterminate, knowing is not as such *something* (*Etwas*) that can reflect other somethings, but pure reflecting itself.⁷ However, by its own process knowing becomes gradually aware that the object is not something given from outside – as if object and knowing were two different 'things', one outside the other – but the result of the activity of knowing and comprehending the object. The allegedly merely real thing becomes by that process an explicit determination *of* knowing and, reciprocally, knowing becomes *itself* real. By assuming in itself as its own self-determination the content that was until then unilaterally real, knowing, which was until then entirely formal and therefore unilaterally ideal, ceases to conceive of itself as a pure mirroring and reveals itself as the *real* activity of knowing, that is, as *action* (*Handeln*) (SL, 729; WdL, GW12, 230; see also EPM, §§468–469; ENZ, §§468–469; VSG, 886–887). Practical activity – or 'will' – is for Hegel the very activity of knowing as far as it is now itself something that is determinate *in itself*. That is why will is, for Hegel, the result of the transition of intelligence *into its own existence*.⁸ 'Practical spirit – says Hegel – not only *has* Ideas but *is* the living Idea itself' (NS, 57; my emphasis).

As the unity of knowing and the world that it knows, knowing becomes itself an *actual singular something* (*Wirkliches*) [SL, 729; WdL, GW12, 231; EPM, §469; ENZ §469; VSG, 531, 886; GW26, §6, 244]; *Einzelnes* [SL, 729–730; WdL, GW12, 231–232; PR, §13 R; GPR, GW14.1, 37 (§13 Anm.); EPM, §469, §471; ENZ, §469, §471; VSG, 138 (§389), 532, 883–884]]. In Hegel's system, practical spirit is, indeed, 'the *actual* spirit' (*der wirkliche Geist*) (VSG, 886; EPM, §482 R; ENZ, §482 Anm.). Precisely because knowing has made explicit to itself that it is an actual subject that acts, the presupposition of the *other* (*Anderes*)⁹ reappears, but it reappears in a way that is specifically different from the way things are other to each other and *seemed* to be other with respect to knowing. When purely theoretical knowing conceives of itself as indeterminate, it conceives of itself as entirely passive with respect to the 'real' things; accordingly, it conceives of the 'real' things as acting *on* knowing and determining it. When, on the contrary, knowing becomes aware that it is itself a being in itself, that is to say, that it is something actual that is at the same time, unlike things that are merely determinate in themselves, *for* itself (*für sich*), it has as practical activity *power* (*Macht*) over its own determinations as well as (potentially) over the determinations of all things, therefore, over the determinate *as such* (GW23.1, 305; GW23.2, 639, 794; VSG, §382, 935). In other words, since knowing is necessarily always knowing a determinate content, the determinate in general is the other with respect to knowing as determinate in itself, that is, as actual knowing or will. However, unlike the other with respect to indeterminate, merely theoretical knowing, the determinate is now something other than can be *actively* negated *by* actual knowing. Thus, Hegel states that actual singular knowing conceives of itself not simply as one singular thing – namely as a self-conscious, singular living mind – amongst the many other singular things of the world; its own actuality entails the *non-actuality* (*Unwirklichkeit*, *Nichtsein*) and *worthlessness* (*Nichtigkeit*) of the entire determinate world, that is, more clearly, of the *own* determinations of the knowing subject (that is why the singular subject can

eventually negate itself by committing suicide) as well as of the determinations of the *other* determinate things (SL, 729–732; WdL, GW12, 231–233; EL, §233; ENZ, §233; GW23.1, 307, 406; GW23.2, 794, 804; GW23.3, §234, 958).

Along these lines, the development of subjective practical spirit consists, for Hegel, in the process of action *on itself* or, what is the same, in the process of *thinking* itself the self-determinate – therefore actual, singular – thinking. The singular mind that at the end of the process of subjective practical spirit has thought itself and, by doing so, has sublated its own immediacy, that is to say, its own immediate self-determinacy is, therefore, the unity of theoretical and practical spirit: *actually* free will (*wirklich freier Wille*) (EPM, §481; ENZ, §481; see also EL §236; ENZ, §236). To elucidate, for Hegel, thinking becomes free spirit when, despite being a concrete and determinate mind, it is a universal form (free will of choice) with respect to its own determinations (its feelings, drives and inclinations); thus, free spirit is nothing other than the living concrete subject that being always determined to be a particular singular subject can nevertheless choose to be or not to be that particular subject. Being embodied minds that are determinate and at the same time free with respect to their own determinacy – and for that same reason with respect to determinacy *in general* – is what defines, according to Hegel, the very nature of human beings.

Merely theoretical knowing is, as stated above, knowing that conceives of itself as entirely indeterminate and, therefore, as determined by the determinate object. On the contrary, the activity of knowing that is determinate in itself, but at the same time free with respect to its own determinateness and, therefore, free with respect to the determinate in general, relates to the other of itself as something that can be (re)determined by the actual, singular activity of knowing. As actually free will, the singular activity of knowing – namely, the living human mind – has power over the determinate; it is something according to which the determinate can be modified, since the determinate is as such only in itself, not, like the living mind, something that is determinate in *and* for itself. From now on, the subject relates with the object as the object related before with the subject. It is in this precise sense that Hegel characterizes the actual activity of knowing as 'objective' (SL, 729–733; WdL, GW12, 231–234). Indeed, in Hegel's system objective spirit is not the 'external' world as far as it has been modified by the subject – artworks and religious ceremonies, which are for Hegel forms of absolute spirit, modify the world too – but the very activity of knowing as far as it gives now the determinate in general its intrinsic value (*gilt*) just as before the determinate in general gave knowing its intrinsic value and determinateness (SL, 732; WdL, GW12, 233).

However, as long as the actually free activity of knowing differs from its other as two entities that are each determinate in itself *as* singular, their relation cannot be reduced to a differentiated identity. With regard to each singular mind, the other minds and the world are always, to a lesser or greater degree, as the case may be, the irreducibly other. The determination of the other by each living free mind is, thus, an endless search and a mere ought. The 'objectivation' of spirit in such logical-ontological framework remains always a *postulate* (*Postulat*) (SL, 731; WdL, GW12, 233; GW23.2, 804) that gives rise to a *progress to infinity*, since, even though the human spirit tries and tries again, at the level of singularity as such the active determination of the other is an unattainable goal

(SL, 732–734; WdL, GW12, 234–235; EL §234; ENZ §234; GW23.2, 639, 645, 804). The development of objective spirit does not rely, thus, on the fact itself that the singular subject seeks once and again to determine the other of itself according to its own goals of free singular subject, but strictly speaking, in sublating *its own singularity*. Indeed, for Hegel, the successive figures of objective spirit are but forms of achieving increasing *universality* in the relations amongst free singular spirits or ‘persons’.

By falling into a progress to infinity, the free singular subject becomes aware that the universalization of the relations between the multiple free singular subjects as singular is not as such sufficient to redetermine the other of each of them – therefore, the other in general of the free singular subject in general. The free singular subject thereby *realizes* that the self-conception of knowing as a singular activity that is determined in itself and for itself is still a deficient way to conceive itself and, accordingly, to conceive the determinate contents that singular knowing knows. According to Hegel, in this act of reflection the activity of knowing overcomes the general realm of its own being-*in-itself* by *positing* its own being-*for-itself*, that is to say, by positing as such knowing or cognition. To elucidate, spirit overcomes the realm of objective spirit by focusing *on knowing itself* and not anymore on the fact that that activity is actual, namely, that it is a real action. That is why Hegel can describe that further act of reflection and deeper self-awareness of the activity of knowing as a restoration of knowing *as such* and, along this line, he can correlate in a general way the following acts of the singular activity of knowing, that is, the acts of absolute spirit, with the acts of the *theoretical* spirit (SL, 731–732; WdL, GW12, 233). By doing so, the singular subject in general, that is, the still *externally* universal spirit (*äußerlich allgemeinen*), that is, the *world-spirit* (*Weltgeist*), ceases to be unilaterally ‘objective’ with respect to the other of itself and becomes explicitly *absolute* spirit (EPM, §549; ENZ, §549).

Absolute spirit as the self-awareness of world-making

Even though at the end of the process of subjective theoretical spirit the activity of knowing entirely determines the object by means of concepts, judgements and inferences, that thoroughgoing determination takes place only on the part of the subject; on the part of the object, determinacy remains, in the last analysis, as something *given* to the knowing subject because the subject conceives of it as belonging to the object as it is *in itself*. Only when the activity of knowing begins to explicitly conceive determinacy as its own *product*, does it enter the final stage of thoroughgoing determination of determinacy in general. That is why Hegel holds the self-manifest production of determinate contents that occurs in art – the person who produces a piece of art knows *that* he/she is producing it – to be a form of *knowing*. Hegel’s philosophy of absolute spirit expounds the progressive operations by means of which the mind actively shapes determinacy in general. The first type of active determination of determinacy in general reduces a content to be the ‘expression’ (*Ausdruck*) (VSG, §457, 1108; EPM, §556, §558; ENZ, §556, §558) of another content, which becomes in turn the ‘soul’ (*Seele*) of the former content, that is to say, its ‘meaning’ (*Bedeutung*) (EPM, §458, R; ENZ, §458, Anm.; VSG, 132–134, 512–517, 523–524; VSG, 837–840,

1107–1108 [§§456–457]). But a content that only expresses other content always keeps its own determinacy. This deficient strategy for determining content is specific to art and, to a lesser extent, to religion. The successive forms of absolute spirit radicalize the process of content determination by performing the different cognitive acts implied in the form of free spirit. A key milestone in the radicalization of the process of content determination is the moment in which the mind stops using perceptual things to express other contents and begins to use for that same purpose *language*. Language is the specific element of comprehending. The transition to language takes place for Hegel still on the stage of art through poetry and, more in general, through literature. In architecture, sculpture, painting and music spirit resorts – in decreasing degree – to external things to express contents that are different from those things. Although sculpture often uses the same kind of materials as architecture – stone, marble, metal, etc. – it negates their determinacy to a greater extent, so that the content that functions as the meaning prevails more than it does in the products of architecture. In painting and music, the used material is colour and sound, which are as such more malleable than tri-dimensional things and can thus be reduced more easily to express other contents. Finally, in poetry and literature the mind operates *at the immanent level of meaning*. Since in the meanings of linguistic signs the correlation between things and sensible intuition and between mental contents and representation is sublated, language is, so to speak, the ‘platonic’ medium of determinacy *as such*: language can speak about things without any need for the things to be present to our senses; in turn, the meaning of a word is not, strictly speaking, a merely subjective content, precisely because it can refer to objects of the real world. What in language is reduced to material for expression of other content is *meaning itself*, not the thing to which meaning refers; thus, for example, painting uses white colour to symbolize purity, while poetry and literature simply use the meaning of the strokes or of the sequence of sounds of the word ‘white’. From this stage on, the active determination of determinacy takes place at the level of meaning through the progressive purification of figurative thinking in the diverse genres of poetry, literature and religious thought. But the result of these types of active sense production is still symbolic and metaphorical. Thus, for example, religious thought seeks to explain the unity between being and thought resorting to the image of the artisan that produces her works from ideas that she previously had in her mind.

Although in the contents produced by figurative thinking one determinacy is subordinated to another, each determinacy remains further partially related to itself. Symbols, metaphors and allegories contain different layers of determinacy that cannot be completely mediated with each other. The mind gradually moves away from figurative thinking by developing ever more abstract ways of systematizing the multiple determinations that it knows. By resorting less and less to symbols, metaphors and allegories and by interrelating determinations in terms of concepts, judgements and inferences, the activity of knowing begins to actively determine determinacy entirely by itself. Exhaustive content determination by knowing – therefore, *self-conscious* content determination – is for Hegel specific only to philosophy. However, even self-conscious content determination shows in the beginning aspects of immediacy; the self-awareness of thoroughgoing content determination by the activity of knowing is a gradual process. The system of objects that philosophy develops has still to become

able to reflect *in its own constitution* that it is a set of contents produced by the activity of knowing. In other words, the objects that constitute the world have still to reveal *as their own determinacy* that they are a *result* of the activity of comprehending them. The remaining difference between the activity of knowing and the determinate contents is finally sublated when the subject determines their determinacy according to the model of their unity with the knowing subject, that is to say, when the world itself contains as its own determinacy its unity with the subject that knows it. Thus, a decisive milestone in the process of self-awareness of the identity between the knowing subject and the world it knows is, for Hegel, *idealism*. Within idealism, *absolute idealism* is, as the self-aware activity of 'world-making', the philosophical system that finally becomes able to develop the full-blown unity of being and thought.

In the chapter on 'Being' and 'Existence' in both the *Greater Logic* and the *Lesser Logic* Hegel relates philosophy to idealism: his main claim about absolute idealism – and ultimately about philosophy in general – is, indeed, that it is the theory that manages to make explicit and justify that the determinations of human thought are likewise the determinations of the real world. Merely theoretical comprehending – namely, comprehending as an activity of *subjective* spirit – is for Hegel the activity of knowing when it develops a general theory about what there is, but does not understand yet what the nature of comprehending implies *for the theory itself* and, therefore, does not rework the theory and its contents on the model of *self-comprehending*. The activity of comprehending that now develops a world theory that reflects in its own structure and contents that same activity of developing the theory – comprehending as an activity of *absolute* spirit – is precisely what to Hegel's eyes defines absolute idealism as the true philosophy. Since in absolute idealism the activity of knowing finally and fully understands the identity between knowing and being, absolute idealism is the philosophical system that is able to comprehend what human beings actually do when they do philosophy and, along this line, what philosophy has been trying to do from its very beginning.

Absolute idealism and metaphilosophy

How the human mind holds the world to be – which kind of objects there are in the world – and what the mind thinks it is doing when it conceives of the world as it does – how the mind conceives of its own activity of conceiving – are for Hegel intrinsically interrelated and depend one on the other. Philosophy is for Hegel the only discipline that develops a general theory that conceives of the world in such a way that its position as the object of theory is essential for its own constitution, that of the theory which examines it and, ultimately, for the mind that develops the theory. For Hegel, that is the specific difference of philosophy with regard to all other sciences as well as it is the specific difference of the objects with which philosophy deals with regard to the objects with which other sciences deal. As it has been stated above, with the exception of philosophy all sciences assume their starting points, that is, they assume their objects as already real. On the contrary, the objects that philosophy has been trying to understand from the beginning of its history – being, essence, substance, etc. – are

for Hegel precisely those in which the human mind can recognize itself as constituent. Unlike any other kind of objects, the objects of philosophical knowledge explicitly reveal in themselves that they are not independent from the knowing mind, but already in their being-in-themselves the relation with the mind that knows them (that is why for Hegel even 'being' is a *logical* category). To put it in another way, the objects with which philosophy deals entail in their own constitution that they are known by the mind and, for the same reason, that knowing is not a pure mirroring – or 'aboutness' – and that the mind is not an empty container that receives its determinations from other beings. For Hegel, philosophy has been from its very beginning the knowledge of those objects that are at the same time real entities of the world and categories of the knowing mind. Since the objects of philosophy are the unity with the mind that knows them and the mind only knows what it can know, in philosophy the mind becomes aware that it actually constitutes *all* objects of the knowable world. The objects of philosophy are, thus, the most universal ontological categories of reality. However, philosophy only gradually becomes aware of the true nature of its contents and of its own true nature. The ultimate reason for this gradualness is, according to Hegel, that the different objects with which philosophy deals are themselves only partly – but always increasingly – manifest forms of the unity between being and thought, between the world and the mind that knows it.

One could be misled to think that in Hegel's system the reflection of philosophy on itself as discipline, that is to say, (the philosophy of) the history of philosophy, is where Hegel expounds his metaphilosophical meditations. Indeed, the history of philosophy contains most of Hegel's key ideas on what philosophy is. Yet, philosophy is ultimately only one of the many events that happen in the world – other events are, for example, causation, animal life, social relations, art and religious beliefs. Philosophy or, more clearly, philosophizing, presupposes the genesis of its own concept because the fact that human beings philosophize does not explain why and how they come to philosophize. The objects and events that philosophy deals with are for Hegel precisely what by themselves – that is, by their own internal dynamics – have led the human mind to make philosophy. As an event that happens in the world, making philosophy further leads philosophizing itself to become aware of what philosophizing is and, thus, what philosophy as content actually is. To elucidate, for Hegel it is not an external *theoretical* reflection of philosophy on itself and its history what makes philosophy become aware of its nature, but it is through the real process of understanding better its contents that philosophy gets to understand its own nature. That is why philosophy is for Hegel the conclusion of the systematic process of contents that philosophy seeks to understand. Philosophy is, thus, part and whole of itself; indeed, for Hegel, philosophy is itself the last *content* of the system of *philosophical sciences*. Amongst other possible contents, philosophy also reflects on its own history. Thus, philosophy always contains, as long as the history of philosophy is itself a philosophical discipline, metaphilosophical reflections. But not only when philosophy analyses its successive systems as developing in time, but already when it analyses their different contents it is already reflecting on itself, since philosophy thereby reflects on how it arises amongst all other activities and on what it does differently from them. Thus, in Hegel's thought philosophy is *as such* metaphilosophy. However, for Hegel it is only in absolute idealism when philosophy

is finally able to retrospectively reconstruct its entire genesis and become, by doing so, fully aware of why the human mind does philosophy and what it is actually doing when it philosophizes.

Notes

- 1 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
- 2 AA 09, 95.17–20: 'Der abstracteste Begriff ist der, welcher mit keinem von ihm verschiedenen etwas gemein hat. Dieses ist der Begriff von Etwas; denn das von ihm Verschiedene ist Nichts, und hat also mit dem Etwas nichts gemein.'
- 3 See SL, 47; WdL, GW21, 55: '*Das reine Wissen*, als in diese Einheit zusammengegangen, *hat alle Beziehung auf ein Anderes und auf Vermittlung aufgehoben; es ist das Unterschiedlose*; dieses Unterschiedlose hört somit selbst auf, Wissen zu seyn; es ist nur einfache Unmittelbarkeit vorhanden. Die einfache Unmittelbarkeit ist selbst ein Reflexionsausdruck und bezieht sich auf den Unterschied von dem Vermittelten. *In ihrem wahren Ausdrücke ist daher diese einfache Unmittelbarkeit das reine Seyn.*' SL, 59; WdL, GW21, 69: 'Es [das reine Seyn, H. F.] ist die reine Unbestimmtheit und Leere. – Es ist nichts in ihm anzuschauen, wenn von Anschauen hier gesprochen werden kann; oder es ist nur diß reine, leere Anschauen selbst. Es ist ebensowenig etwas in ihm zu denken, oder es ist ebenso *nur diß leere Denken* [...] Nichts Anschauen oder Denken hat also eine Bedeutung; beyde werden unterschieden, so ist (existirt) Nichts in unserem Anschauen oder Denken; oder vielmehr *ist es das leere Anschauen und Denken selbst und dasselbe leere Anschauen oder Denken als das reine Seyn.*' SL, 73; WdL, GW21, 84: 'Bey dieser ganz abstracten Reinheit der Continuität, d. i. Unbestimmtheit und Leerheit des Vorstellens ist es gleichgültig, diese Abstraction Raum zu nennen, oder reines Anschauen, *reines Denken* [...] Dieses dumpfe, *leere Bewußtseyn ist, als Bewußtseyn aufgefaßt, – das Seyn.*' – EL, §86; ENZ, §86: '*Das reine Seyn* macht den Anfang, *weil es sowohl reiner Gedanke*, als das unbestimmte einfache Unmittelbare ist, der erste Anfang aber nichts vermitteltes und weiter bestimmtes seyn kann.' GW23.3, §86 Z1, 860: 'Wir haben, wenn angefangen wird zu denken, *nichts als den Gedanken in seiner reinen Bestimmungslosigkeit*, denn zur Bestimmung gehört schon Eines und ein Anderes; im Anfang aber haben wir noch kein Anderes. Das Bestimmungslose, wie wir es hier haben, ist das Unmittelbare, nicht die vermittelte Bestimmungslosigkeit, nicht die Aufhebung aller Bestimmtheit, sondern die Unmittelbarkeit der Bestimmungslosigkeit, die Bestimmungslosigkeit vor aller Bestimmtheit, das Bestimmungslose als Allererstes. *Dieß aber nennen wir das Seyn.*' GW23.3, §88, 863: 'Man hört sehr häufig behaupten, das Denken sey dem Seyn entgegengesetzt. Bei solcher Behauptung wäre indeß zunächst zu fragen, was unter dem Seyn verstanden werde? Nehmen wir das Seyn auf, wie solches die Reflexion bestimmt, so können wir von demselben nur aussagen, es sey dasselbe das schlechthin Identische und Affirmative. Betrachten wir nunmehr das Denken, so kann es uns nicht entgehen, daß dasselbe wenigstens *gleichfalls* das schlechthin mit sich Identische ist. *Beiden, dem Seyn und dem Denken, kommt somit dieselbe Bestimmung zu. Diese Identität des Seyns und des Denkens* ist nun aber nicht konkret zu nehmen und somit nicht zu sagen, der Stein sey als seyender dasselbe, was der denkende Mensch ist.' (In all cases

- my emphasis, H.F.) For a closer examination of Hegel's claim of the unity of being and thought at the beginning of the *Logic*, see Ferreiro (2017: 97–122).
- 4 For a closer analysis of the relation between the history of philosophy and the self-understanding of philosophy in Hegel, see Ware (1996: 253–279; 1999: 145–146, 156–159, 204–205).
 - 5 The argument that proves that philosophy is the highest form of self-knowledge is, strictly speaking, the entire system of philosophy itself. For the coextensivity of philosophy and metaphilosophy in Hegel, see Miolli (2017: 119–121) and Miolli's contribution, Chapter 26, in this volume.
 - 6 The *Philosophy of Mind (Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830))* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (2007).
 - 7 For Hegel's account of the relation between the categories of 'something' (*Etwas*) and 'other' (*Anderes*) in the *Logic*, see SL, 89–95; WdL, GW21, 104–110; EL, §§91–93; ENZ §§91–93.
 - 8 VSG, GW25.2, 886–887: 'Der praktische Geist ist eigentlich erst der wirkliche Geist in so fern er damit als unmittelbare Weise; hier tritt für ihn die Endlichkeit ein. Die Intelligenz ist darin frei; gegen diese Freiheit ist die bestimmung der Unmittelbarkeit und so tritt sie in die Endlichkeit ein.' PR, §13 R; GPR, GW14.1, §13 Anm., 37: 'Im Willen beginnt daher die eigene Endlichkeit der Intelligenz.' VSG, GW25.2, 883: 'Der praktische Geist ist das concrete Denken; er ist dies: zur bestimmung des Unmittelbaren überzugehen und mit einem Zweck. Diese Unmittelbarkeit von der das Denken frei geworden, ist doch das, in das es zurückkehrt[.] Die Welt, ihr Gefühl hat die Intelligenz verdaut, und hat sie als das Ihrige und hat sich mit sich zusammengeschlossen, ist frei; dieses Resultat: sich mit sich zusammengeschlossen zu haben ist eben das Zurückgekehrtsein zur einfachen Einheit mit sich selbst, und hat sich so als unmittelbar (zur Einzelheit) bestimmt.' EPM, §469; ENZ, §469: 'Der Geist als Wille weiß sich als sich in sich beschließend und sich aus sich erfüllend. Dies erfüllte Fürsichsein oder Einzelheit macht die Seite der Existenz oder Realität von der Idee des Geistes aus.'
 - 9 SL, 729–730; WdL, GW12, 231–232: 'In der praktischen Idee aber steht er als Wirkliches, dem Wirklichen gegenüber ... Die Willens-Idee hat als das selbstbestimmende für sich den Inhalt in sich selbst. Dieser ist nun zwar bestimmter Inhalt, und insofern ein endliches und beschränktes; die Selbstbestimmung ist wesentlich Besonderung, da die Reflexion des Willens in sich als negative Einheit überhaupt auch Einzelheit im Sinne des Ausschliessens und des Voraussetzens eines Anders ist.'

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Absolute Method and Metaphilosophical Investigation

Michela Bordignon

Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to analyse the relation between metaphilosophy and absolute method in Hegel's thought. I expound the possibility of considering dialectic as a philosophical method that is metaphilosophical *par excellence* because it burdens itself with the vocation to face the *aporia* that characterizes metaphilosophy in its deepest radicality.¹

The historical and theoretical obstacles that prevent one from ascribing any sort of metaphilosophical intent to Hegel are significant. On the historical side, we need to remember that metaphilosophy is a philosophical area of research that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. This is not a decisive issue – after all, the absence of the word 'logic' in Aristotelian texts does not prevent anyone from recognizing the presence of a well-defined logical theory within the *organon*. Thus, the absence of the word 'metaphilosophy' in Hegel's texts should not prevent us from looking for metaphilosophical insights in his philosophical project. However, the situation is much more complicated when we consider the theoretical obstacles. Hegel's claims regarding previous analyses of knowledge are widely known. If one applies these claims to philosophy, the problems for metaphilosophy are evident:

If, however, we do not delude ourselves with words, it is easy to see that other tools may very well be examined and evaluated in ways other than undertaking the actual work for which they are determined. But the examination of knowing cannot take place other than *by way of knowing*. With this so-called instrument, examining it means nothing other than acquiring knowledge of it. But to want to know *before* one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic's wise resolution to learn to *swim, before he ventured into the water*.

(EL, §10 A)²

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A tool is normally evaluated by considering its performance with respect to the goal to be realized: the evaluating activity is different from what is evaluated. However, knowledge in general and philosophy in particular are unlike any other kind of tool. The evaluation of a certain body of knowledge is itself some sort of knowledge, and the evaluation of a specific philosophical project implies some sort of philosophical investigation. Therefore, the door for a metaphilosophical project in Hegel's thought seems to be shut. Actually, what I want to show is that Hegel presents a strong *ante litteram* criticism of metaphilosophy as the latter is standardly conceived. Nonetheless, I claim that precisely on the basis of this criticism, Hegel's philosophy enables a new way to think about and work with metaphilosophy.

To accomplish these goals, I will focus on the meaning, relevance and implications of dialectic as absolute method in Hegel's *Logic*. More specifically, I will analyse some implications of the thesis presented by Miolli (2017; Chapter 26, in this volume) and Ware (1999), according to which Hegel's metaphilosophy can and must be conceived as coextensive with his philosophy because the Hegelian method approaches its own knowledge and practices as its objects of investigation. Is that really possible? What are the metaphilosophical implications of this move?

To answer these questions, I will proceed as follows: (1) I will start with a brief presentation of Hegel's conception of method; (2) I will show the relevance of this method for metaphilosophical investigation; and (3) I will show that this conception of method endorses the radicality of the *aporia* that characterizes metaphilosophy and that Hegel's approach to this *aporia* opens up the philosophical space for a reconsideration of the nature of metaphilosophy itself.³

Dialectic as absolute method

In the history of philosophy, the word 'dialectic' has had different meanings. Aristotle, in one of his lost dialogues entitled the *Sophist*, spoke of Zeno as the inventor of dialectic (Diogenes Laertius 1925: 373). In Zeno's philosophy, dialectic is a kind of refutational procedure that aims to demonstrate a thesis by showing the contradictory character of its antithesis. For example, Zeno showed that the thesis according to which things are many implies a contradictory conclusion. The dimension of the dialogue is fundamental too because the refutation occurs in a confrontation between two subjects discussing the same topic and arguing for opposite theses. This feature of dialectic becomes crucial with Socrates' and Plato's philosophies, whereby dialectic turns out to be the structure of philosophical discourse itself. Therefore, in Zeno, but also in Socrates and Plato, dialectic is both an argumentative procedure and the form of philosophical discourse. This general meaning of the term dialectic is the one that we can trace back to the ancient philosophical tradition.

In medieval times, dialectic was associated with grammar and rhetoric in the *trivium*: grammar was meant to have a propaedeutic function in relation to the other liberal arts,⁴ whereas rhetoric and dialectic were meant to persuade through dialogue, the former via techniques of speaking and the latter via techniques of analysis. Starting

with Kant, dialectic was considered the criticism of the *logic of appearance*, which meant to unmask the contradictions necessarily implied by the illegitimate use of the categories of understanding.

When it comes to Hegel, rather than being only a kind of form of philosophical discourse, dialectic also deals with the content of this discourse, corresponding to some sort of conception of reality that consists of unities of opposites.⁵ As Nuzzo points out, 'the problem of dialectic is the problem of grasping change, this is possible only by daring to perform the transition to one's opposite, that is, by taking change upon oneself' (2018: 26). In effect, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel recognizes Zeno as the inventor of dialectic (VGP I, 295), but he also says that Heraclitus represents a turning point in the conception of dialectic: from a principle of discourse, dialectic becomes a principle of reality.⁶

Therefore, the first thing we can say about Hegel's dialectic is that it deals with the structure of reality.⁷ Nevertheless, Hegel's dialectic is still a kind of form of philosophical discourse – that is to say, it is still a method. And when one thinks of method, one thinks of a certain way of doing something. In the case of philosophy, the method is generally supposed to be the way in which philosophical investigation has to proceed. But then, how is it possible for Hegel to think of dialectic as a method and, at the same time, as a conception of reality? What does this imply for Hegel's conception of philosophy and the form of philosophical investigation? To answer these questions, we need to understand what Hegel means by dialectic not only as a philosophical method but also as *the* philosophical method.

In the first paragraph of his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel claims that philosophy cannot presuppose anything either about its object or its method (EL, §1). The presuppositionless character of philosophy is necessary for philosophy to be properly scientific. Philosophy is not just a science; rather, it is *the science*, and it is the science precisely because, by being presuppositionless, it is completely grounded in itself.

Therefore, for example, philosophy cannot borrow the method of other sciences.⁸ This does not imply the rejection of all forms of method in Hegel's philosophy. Quite the contrary, Hegel develops a new conception of method, which he does not consider to be a formal procedure of argumentation that is defined prior to its application to a given content.⁹ Rather, in the first preface to the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel characterizes method as being 'identical with the content' (EL, 5). In the *Logic*, he claims that there 'it can only be *the nature of the content* which is responsible for *movement* in scientific knowledge, for it is the content's *own reflection* that first posits and *generates what that content is*' (SL, 9–10).

The identity of method and content is the crucial point to keep in mind for understanding Hegel's notion of absolute method. The word 'absolute' means exactly that dialectic is not dependent on any given content in order to be performed as a philosophical method of investigation. Dialectic is the absolute method because it is self-sufficient in relation to its content. However, dialectic is not a subjective, formal and external model to be applied to the object of philosophical discourse (this is why it cannot be established prior to its being performed in philosophical knowledge). Instead, dialectic is objective because it is the self-determination of the structure of the

object being investigated, which means that the method 'is not distinct from its object and content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance' (SL, 54).¹⁰

At this point, we can be sure of the following:

1. The method of philosophy is identical with the latter's content (EL, 5), namely with the object of philosophy.
2. We cannot presuppose anything about this object (EL, §1).

As a result, every kind of presupposition seems to be suspended. Therefore, the content to be investigated – that is, the object of philosophy – is the result of the suspension. This content is absolutely indeterminate; put differently, at the beginning of his system, Hegel claims that this absolute indeterminate content is being. If the method is identical to its content, performing this method is nothing but the process of rendering explicit the internal structure of the content of being itself. To understand how the method works, let us see what happens when we think of the indeterminacy of pure being.

The content of being is absolutely indeterminate. Thus, in thinking pure being, thought thinks a content that is not content after all because pure being reveals its absolute indeterminacy. Being loses its consistency and becomes nothing. Then, the initial content turns out to be its own transition, or its own passing over, into its opposite. If we think of the content of being without assuming anything about it, being turns out to be this very transition. Consequently, the very thought of being starts to determine itself: its absolute indeterminacy generates the thought of nothing (EL, §87).

Now, from a metaphilosophical perspective, what Hegel does in this initial step of the system is simple: he investigates a conceptual content and he makes explicit all its implications.¹¹ He claims that 'the whole progression in philosophizing (insofar as it is a methodical, i.e. *necessary* progression) is nothing other than merely the *positing* of what is already contained in a concept' (EL, §88). The passage from one category to the other is achieved by simply thinking through what is involved in the thought of a category, and this process corresponds to the way that the category's content inherently unfolds itself and its internal structure, which is equivalent to the dialectic of this category, or to what Hegel calls the soul or movement of the concept: 'This spiritual movement, which in its simplicity gives itself its determinateness, and in this determinateness gives itself its self-equality – this movement, which is thus the immanent development of the concept, is the absolute method of the concept, the absolute method of cognition and at the same time the immanent soul of the content' (SL, 10).¹² The dialectical aspect of this method consists of the process that inherently leads thought from the conception of a category to the conception of the opposite category, which is necessarily implied in the first – for example, in the case of being, being turns out to be nothing, or in the case of the finite, the finite turns out to be the infinite, or in the case of cause, cause turns out to be effect and so on. Hence, dialectic does not coincide with an argumentative procedure, as the ancient notion of dialectic supposed. What is going on is not a process of refutation between two theses, positions

or ideas. Nevertheless, there is a process of self-refutation that is internal to a line of thought. In our example, the beginning of the logic is the self-refutation of the thought of pure being, which turns out to be more than its immediate indeterminacy because pure being passes over into its opposite, namely nothing, and then into becoming. One could say that the thought of pure being revises itself into the thought of nothing and then into the thought of becoming.

However, Hegel's dialectical transformations are not the simple replacement of a category with its opposite on the basis of the former's contradictory character.¹³ A category's dialectical transformation into another category does not imply the falsity of the former and the truth of the latter but the unfolding of the initial category's content into new content.¹⁴ For example, in the transition to nothing, being is not declared to be false because the transition to nothing is a further determination of what being is in itself. Furthermore, it is the content of being itself that demands the thought which thinks being to follow the transformation of the category's (i.e. being's) content. This transformation continuously challenges, questions and drives thought to redetermine its immediate conception of each single category and to rethink all categories in a more concrete, complete and truer way.

In this sense, Hegel's dialectic is a modern dialectic insofar as it is the process of unfolding different conceptions of reality, which can be purely metaphysical, as in the case of logic, as well as forms for conceptualizing the natural and cultural worlds, as in the case of the *Realphilosophie*. Nonetheless, in its depths, Hegel's dialectic also preserves the refutational and dialogical character of the ancient conception of dialectic because it pushes philosophical thought to become involved in a continuous and necessary dialogue and critical confrontation with itself. This refutational and dialogical character is the aspect of dialectic that we need to focus on if we aim to understand the relation between Hegel's method, his unintentional metaphilosophical vocation and, as I will show, the nature of metaphilosophical investigation as such.

Absolute dialectic as metaphilosophy

In this part of the chapter, I want to show that the relation between Hegel's dialectic and metaphilosophy can be articulated at different levels and that the highest level involves the very nature of metaphilosophical investigation itself.

First, dialectic can be and has already been the object of metaphilosophical investigations. Hegel's dialectic has been one of the candidates examined by metaphilosophers when they ask questions like 'What is the method of philosophy?', 'Is there more than one adequate method of philosophy?' and 'What is the domain of each method?'¹⁵

Second, dialectic is not only a method worth being investigated by metaphilosophy, but it can also be the method for metaphilosophical investigation. In fact, dialectic neither presupposes any other method as valid nor assumes any definite notion of method as such. On the basis of this meta-methodological assumptions, dialectic represents an interesting philosophical 'tool' for analysing the following:

1. different kinds of methods, as it does not assume the validity of any of them;
2. the very notion of method itself.

Both problems are treated at various points in Hegel's philosophical systems. I will mention only one example for each problem.

In relation to the metaphilosophical examination of different kinds of method, we can briefly consider, for example, Hegel's dialectical investigation of the analytic method.¹⁶ In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel defines this method as follows:

This activity thus consists in dissolving the given concrete dimension, individuating its differences, and giving them the form of *abstract universality*; or in leaving the concrete dimension as the *ground* and, through abstraction from the particularities that seem inessential, extracting a concrete universal, the *genus* or the force and the law. Such is the *analytic method*.

(EL, §227)

The analytic method assumes concrete content based on representation, which corresponds to ordinary thought, as its ground. It operates by detecting the elements of this content and engaging in a process of abstraction that allows for identification of the universal structure of the examined content.¹⁷ The concrete articulation implicit in a particular content is accounted for and made explicit in terms of a universal concept. This is not only the method of empirical sciences but also of empiricism in general.¹⁸ The analysis of the analytic method is thus not only the analysis of a scientific method but also the analysis of a philosophical method, an analysis that employs an explicitly metaphilosophical perspective.

Hegel's analysis of this method is dialectical precisely in the sense that I presented in the first part of the chapter. Hegel investigates what this method consists of, and he discloses all its implications. In other words, Hegel puts the empiricist in dialogue with herself/himself so that she/he understands what she/he is actually doing when using the analytic method. Through this self-investigation, the empiricist ends up developing the awareness of the two incompatible commitments involved in the use of her/his method. On the one hand, the empiricist believes that analysis is perfectly passive and neutral with respect to the content that is assumed as something given.¹⁹ On the other hand, she/he realizes that in the 'analytic investigation', *the I* plays a constitutive role: the I is not a simple receptor of the information given in concrete content; rather, it is an active I, whose analysis modifies the content itself.²⁰ The neutrality of the process is thus undermined, and, Hegel claims, it is 'immediately evident ... that the sort of knowing that wants to take things as they *are* thereby falls into self-contradiction' (EL, §227). This contradiction does not imply the falsity of the method and the need to drop one of its two incompatible commitments or of the analytic method in general. A method is not true or false but more or less effective in relation to its purpose.²¹ Hegel is well aware of this, and through dialectical investigation, he discloses the potential of the analytic method, its limits and the need for it to find a complement in further processes of knowledge.

This is just one example of how dialectic is not only the object of metaphilosophical investigations on the methods of philosophy but also a good candidate for being an

effective method for metaphilosophy itself. The dialectical metaphilosophical method implicit in Hegel's philosophy consists of suspending all assumptions that concern a specific method and of performing an immanent investigation of that method.

In relation to the second issue, namely the metaphilosophical examination of the notion of method, Hegel's dialectic offers a privileged perspective from which to approach this problem. In the last chapter of the *Logic*, Hegel presents the limits of the standard notion of method, which presupposes a conception of knowledge whereby form and content are independent. On the one hand, content, to which method is merely applied, is assumed as something given – that is, content is not justified in itself, and therefore it cannot serve as a firm and solid foundation for a system of knowledge.²² On the other hand, the method is meant to be an external form that equally lacks an autonomous justification.²³ This lack of foundation undermines the scientific pretensions of knowledge. A new notion of method, which overcomes the limits of the standard one, is required.

Therefore, method cannot be a simple tool that a subject applies to a content, as if method were something in between them, a middle term aimed at putting the subject and content in some sort of relation, which is destined to remain merely external. Such arbitrariness of the method would prevent the subject from grasping the content to be known, as an external structure would be imposed on it.²⁴ According to Hegel, the true method involves the form immanent in the content itself – that is, the content's structure and the way that it unfolds itself. The true method is thus objective – as it corresponds to the content's intrinsic determinateness – as well as subjective because it coincides, at the same time, with the process of the actual knowledge of the content itself: 'method is ... the determinateness in-and-for-itself of the concept, and the concept is the middle term only because it equally has the significance of the objective; in the conclusion, therefore, the objective does not attain only an external determinateness by virtue of the method, but is posited rather in its identity with the subjective concept' (SL, 737–738). Through this new notion of method, the subject and object of knowledge become an integrated unity, in which the subject manages to give thought and voice to the constitution of the object, and the object finds its concrete truth within the subject's immanent reflection on said object.

In this sense, Hegel's dialectic has a metaphilosophical relevance insofar as it can be interpreted as a metamethod in the fullest sense: the application of critical reflection upon various sorts of methods and upon the standard notion of method as well. However, the dialectic is not motivated by a critical aim only. Hegel's objective is not to reject the other philosophical and scientific methods or to get rid of the standard use of this notion. On the contrary, he aims at defining the range of objects to which the use of traditional methods can be legitimately and effectively applied and, most importantly, at redetermining the very notion of method itself.

Nevertheless, from a metaphilosophical perspective, one could question what kind of legitimization Hegel can offer for his dialectic, which is supposed to be both the method and content of a philosophical investigation.

First, one could ask where the legitimization of the dialectic as a method of metaphilosophy can be found. The meta-methodological reflection on any kind of method seems to require a meta-meta-method validating the meta-reflection and so on, *ad infinitum*. Hegel offers a solution to block this infinite regress by tracing back

the criteria for the validity of dialectic to the content being investigated. For example, in the case of the dialectical analysis of the analytic method, this specific method turns out to be non-identical with its content, or to translate Hegel's terminology into simpler language, the analytic method is not compatible with its own commitments. The dialectic is nothing but the explication of this incompatibility and its implications, which are entailed in the content itself and are independent of any external assumptions.

Second, one could also ask for the legitimation of dialectic as determining the content of philosophy. Actually, one of metaphilosophy's main questions concerns the topics and problems that are to be investigated by philosophy. Hegel's way of dealing with this further legitimation problem can be found in his meta-methodological assumption of not assuming any specific content at all. Hegel starts from an empty logical space, letting philosophical thought progressively articulate this space at different levels, whereby the content-presuppositions of other sciences and philosophical approaches are critically examined.

Hegel's notion of method also implies a new answer to the classical metaphilosophical problem of philosophy's purpose – that is, whether philosophy should be descriptive or normative (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 18). Hegel shows the impossibility of distinguishing these two dimensions of philosophy, which separated exclusively, are pure abstractions (Miolli 2017: 95–96). What a Hegelian metaphilosopher would do is direct each specific philosophical approach to enter into a dialogue with itself, as if the dialectical thinker was a sort of philosophical therapist, enabling each philosophical patient to become aware of what it really is to understand what it has to do to improve its performances.²⁵ The aim of such therapy would be the auto-analysis of each philosophical approach in terms of its own limits, not only to acknowledge such limits but to open up a new domain of philosophical reflection that could overcome them. This is quite clear if we consider, for example, Hegel's analysis of Spinoza's philosophy, which leads everyone who wants to endorse a metaphysic of substance to necessarily embrace a metaphysics of subjectivity. In this sense, much work on the therapeutic value of Hegel's philosophy, which would be different from the kind highlighted by Wittgenstein, remains to be done.²⁶

To sum up, I have shown in which sense Hegel's dialectical method is worth being considered as (1) an object of metaphilosophical investigation and (2) a method of metaphilosophy itself. One last step is missing, which concerns the relation between the dialectic and the very nature of metaphilosophy. With the dialectical method, Hegel unintentionally touches on the *aporia* that affects all metaphilosophical projects. In the final part of the chapter, I will show that Hegel's unconscious insight can enable us to construct a new, unorthodox conception of metaphilosophy.

Metaphilosophy as dialectic

In this last part of the chapter, my aim is quite ambitious. Not content with demonstrating that dialectic is a sound method of metaphilosophical investigation, I want to show that it would be a particularly successful one because dialectic has

the capacity to address, without falling prey to, the *aporia* with which all standard metaphilosophical discourses necessarily get involved.

First, I think that Hegel's philosophy can offer an *ante litteram* criticism of metaphilosophy as the latter is standardly conceived.²⁷ It suffices to consider the three main meanings that are normally ascribed to the prefix '*meta*' in the word 'metaphilosophy':

1. 'Meta' as beyond: metaphilosophy is supposed to analyse philosophy from a point of view that takes distance from philosophy itself. It is questionable whether metaphilosophy is part of philosophy. Regardless of the answer – that is, whether metaphilosophy is completely distinct from philosophy or a part of philosophy – metaphilosophical analysis would still rely on a perspective that is different from that of the object being investigated.
2. 'Meta' as post: metaphilosophical analysis is supposed to take place after philosophy itself.
3. 'Meta' as about: metaphilosophy is the philosophy of philosophy and thus has itself as its own object of investigation; philosophy is applied to itself.²⁸

The first two meanings presuppose a difference between philosophy and metaphilosophy. In the third meaning, this difference is called into question.

The critical analysis of the relation between philosophy and metaphilosophy leads us to the *aporetic* purpose of metaphilosophy, which is evident in the word 'metaphilosophy' itself. In effect, this word expresses the two seemingly incompatible vocations of any metaphilosophical project. On the one hand, the word metaphilosophy, through the prefix '*meta*', expresses some sort of difference between the metaphilosophical level of investigation and its philosophical object. On the other hand, the word 'metaphilosophy', by including 'philosophy', is supposed to maintain its philosophical purpose and to preserve some sort of identity with philosophy. The different ways of interpreting what metaphilosophy is about tend to focus on one or the other aspect – that is, either on the identity or the difference between metaphilosophy and philosophy. If identity prevails, the specificity of metaphilosophy is lost. If difference prevails, metaphilosophy turns out to be an activity that is supposed to be external with respect to philosophy, which endangers its philosophical character.

The same *aporia* can be presented in different terms by looking back at the legitimization problem regarding the criteria used by metaphilosophers. If metaphilosophy is simply identical with philosophy – that is, if it is simply a philosophical investigation applied to itself – the legitimating criteria should be searched for in philosophy itself. The unwanted implication of this self-reference would be the ungroundedness of metaphilosophy's methodological criteria of evaluation and, with them, of their legitimating value. A way to avoid this ungroundedness involves presupposing a difference between philosophy and metaphilosophy. Therefore, the metaphilosophical criteria would be external with respect to metaphilosophy's object of investigation. However, one could ask where the justification of the metaphilosophical criteria can

be found. We could try to answer this question by locating the justification in a domain that is external to metaphilosophy. As mentioned earlier, it would be difficult to stop the infinite regress, and the lack of a proper ground for our criteria would remain unsolved.

I think Hegel's dialectic allows us to avoid the two horns of this *aporia*. The way out of this impasse can be found in the presupposition with which the *aporia* begins: the legitimation of the methodological criteria depends on a level of discourse that must be different from the one in which the criteria perform their function. The difference between philosophy and metaphilosophy is thus the unavoidable outcome of what metaphilosophy is and of how it needs to work.²⁹ This is exactly the reason why many interpreters, such as Berthold-Bond, think that finding a metaphilosophy in Hegel's philosophical project is a *mission impossible* (Berthold-Bond 1986) because Hegel's mature work is built precisely on the dissolution of the distinction between the subject performing the investigation and the object being investigated. Based on this consideration, we can certainly recognize in Hegel's mature philosophy a radical criticism of metaphilosophy as it is standardly conceived: 'A *preliminary* explication [of the thinking operative in the philosophical manner of knowing] would thus have to be an unphilosophical one and could not be more than a web of presuppositions, assurances, and formal reasoning, a web, that is, of casual assertions against which the opposite could be maintained with equal right' (EL, §10). Such a 'preliminary explication' is exactly the kind of analysis of philosophical thinking that takes distance from its object and that characterizes traditional metaphilosophy. Such an analysis is destined to be based on a set of presuppositions whose lack of justification necessarily affects its legitimating value.

But is Hegel really rejecting all metaphilosophy? Is he not unintentionally presenting a different way of thinking about metaphilosophical research? Does the deactivation of the distinction between the subject and the object of investigation necessarily imply the impossibility of metaphilosophical reflection? I think it does not. In fact, Hegel himself clearly states the necessity to investigate and legitimate the thinking that operates in philosophical investigations: 'The thinking operative in the philosophical manner of knowing needs to be understood in its necessity. Equally, its capacity to produce knowledge of the absolute objects needs to be justified' (EL, §10). According to Hegel, the philosophical investigation of philosophy is not only a possible task of philosophy but also a necessary one. The elimination of the distinction between the subject and the object of philosophical investigation does not imply the impossibility of a philosophical investigation of philosophy.³⁰ Certainly, the criticism of this distinction can be assumed to be the basis of a criticism of standard metaphilosophy, but it also hints at the necessity to think metaphilosophical activity not without but within philosophy itself: 'Such understanding [the thinking operative in the philosophical manner of knowing] ... is itself a case of philosophical knowledge that can accordingly fall *within* philosophy alone' (EL, §10).

Similarly, at the beginning of his *Logic*, Hegel not only underlines that logic cannot presuppose anything concerning its content and method but also points out that 'the *concept* itself of *science* as such ... belongs to its content and even makes up its final

result' (SL, 23). In the quoted lines, the meaning of the word 'concept' corresponds to the complete realization of science, which involves the truth of science and, thus, its proper justification, something that is neither unfolded in a preliminary investigation of the notion of logic nor presented in a posthumous analysis of what logic has done. The concept of logic and, more generally, of philosophy, comes 'after' the philosophical investigation, but not as something standing outside philosophy's domain. Quite the contrary, such concept arises from the intrinsic development of philosophical reflection, as its own result, and forms a constitutive part of this reflection. Therefore, far from rejecting metaphilosophical analysis because of the *aporia* that it implies and that Hegel would certainly acknowledge, Hegel could be said to propose a new way of conceiving the metaphilosophical method. Of course, we cannot directly attribute to Hegel's dialectic a metaphilosophical discourse *on* philosophy, but we can certainly identify a kind of metaphilosophical analysis that is developed *within* philosophical practice itself.

Facing the constitutive *aporia* that is inherent to the self-referential character of the philosophy of philosophy, Hegel would not choose the easiest way of dissolving it – that is, Hegel would not admit a distinction between metaphilosophy and its object because he would be perfectly aware that this move would prevent philosophy from reaching the justification that it was supposed to attain. The radicality of the investigation to which philosophy is destined would thus be unattainable. Instead, Hegel would suggest assuming the aporetic structure of metaphilosophical activity, whereby both the identity and the difference between metaphilosophy and philosophy need to be involved in a constant exchange.

On the one hand, this difference certainly cannot arise due to the distinction between the subject and the object of investigation. Instead, the difference between philosophy and metaphilosophy arises as part of the dialectical nature of the object itself. Dialectic is not a formal method applied to a content, as it consists of a philosophical discourse that is the explication of the structure of specific content, category, philosophical thesis or method. Insofar as this structure is made explicit, the object unfolds itself and presents itself in a new domain, where its immediate constitution is negated, its inconsistencies and limits are recognized, and a new form of thinking the object is displayed. In this dialectical dynamic, philosophy feeds itself in a self-referential dialogue, in which its own contents, categories and methods are analysed, called into question and redetermined.

On the other hand, the identity between philosophy and metaphilosophy is secured via the self-referential structure of Hegel's method. From a metaphilosophical perspective, this structure could be considered problematic. Metaphilosophy, intended as a philosophy of philosophy, runs the risk of becoming entangled in the problem of finding a proper legitimation for its own evaluating criteria. This is the problem of all metaphilosophy conceived according to the structure of self-containment, which Ware³¹ and Miolli³² refer to when discussing the metaphilosophy implicit in Hegel's project. Therefore, we need to account for the possibility of philosophy being the philosophy of philosophy – that is, for the possibility of metaphilosophical investigation being contained in philosophy and, conversely, for the possibility of philosophy revealing its metaphilosophical relevance.

To explain this relation of self-containment, Ware mentions Russell's and Zermelo's treatment of set paradoxes. Regarding self-reference in paradoxes, Russell writes as follows:

In all the above contradictions ... there is a common characteristic, which we may describe as self-reference or reflexiveness. The remark of Epimenides must include itself in its own scope. If *all* classes, provided they are not members of themselves, are members of *w*, this must also apply to *w* ... In each contradiction something is said about *all* cases of some kind, and from what is said a new case seems to be generated, which both is and is not of the same kind as the cases of which *all* were concerned in what was said.

(Russell 1908: 61)

Russell is referring to non-predicative definitions, which refer to a totality that the object being defined is a part of. Russell's solution to the problem implied by non-predicative definitions is to deny the possibility of sets corresponding to such illegitimate totalities. An illegitimate totality is the set of all the elements that satisfy a determinate condition and is, at the same time, an element of itself. In the same way, philosophical discourse contains itself – or at least its object and its method – as one of its members. The fact that illegitimate totalities may involve paradoxes is well known, and I think this paradox is also what generates the *aporia* at the core of metaphilosophy.

Hegel's philosophy does not try to dissolve this *aporia* as something illegitimate, which is the way that Russell deals with the paradox. On the contrary, Hegel thinks through and radicalizes the consequences of the *aporia*. Each determination, category or thesis in Hegel's philosophy is like a set, which is applied to itself. Therefore, each determination, category or thesis has particular content, and this content presents a condition that the content itself needs to satisfy. This implies that the content of the determination both satisfies the condition that is immanent in said content and, at the same time, does not satisfy this condition. In other words, the conceptual content of the determination is contained in a totality that the determination defines while transcending it.

I offer the following example: the *Philosophy of Right* starts with a discussion on free will and its immediate determination as the freedom of choice, which is supposed to be the minimal conception of what it means for everyone to be free. Nevertheless, Hegel also shows that the minimal notion of freedom does not satisfy the minimal condition that the most immediate way of conceiving choice implies, which is the freedom to choose whatever one wants. Actually, choice can never meet this condition because someone free to choose is always obligated to choose between the instincts and desires that are imposed by nature and culture. In this example, choice sets its own condition to realize its freedom and, because of its intrinsic limits, choice transcends itself into another form of freedom, which is the free will that wants the free will. In this transcendence, Hegel moves from a first-order philosophical discourse on freedom to a meta-order, using which he starts to question, as in a metaphilosophical perspective, the method- and content-presuppositions of the entire modern philosophical investigation of the notions of freedom and right.

In this sense, the notion of self-containment is a necessary but insufficient condition for shedding light on the relation between philosophy and metaphilosophy in Hegel's thought. I would substitute the prefix of the notion of self-containment and change it to 'trans-containment'. In effect, a dialectical reflection on a determinate method or category always necessarily springs from the content of the very method or category and is thus contained and identical with this content. At the same time, the dialectical reflection on this content also questions its immediate structure, defines its limits and then transcends its domain.

In the introduction of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel claims that the logical system is a circle of circles. If we think of each circle as specific philosophical content, the trans-containment relation between Hegel's philosophy and his metaphilosophical vocation can be made explicit: 'The individual circle simply because it is in itself a totality, also breaks through the boundary of its element and founds a further sphere' (EL, §15). In the treatment of absolute method at the end of the *Logic*, Hegel is even clearer:

The enrichment proceeds in the *necessity* of the concept, it is contained by it [*sie ist von ihm gehalten*], and every determination is a reflection into itself [*Reflexion in sich*]. Each new stage of *exteriorization* [*Außersichgehen*], that is, of *further determination*, is also a withdrawing into itself [*In-sich-gehen*], and the greater the *extension*, just as dense is the *intensity*. The richest is therefore the most concrete and the *most subjective*, and that which retreats to the simplest depth is the mightiest and the most all-encompassing.

(SL, 750)

Each dialectical moment is a more or less explicit confrontation with a specific philosophical approach, thesis or method of the Western philosophical tradition. This confrontation has two sides: On the one hand, dialectic method is the immanent explication of the constitution of a specific content, as if the content itself could perform and contain in itself its own critical reflection upon itself. On the other hand, dialectic is also a further determination of each approach, thesis or method – that is, the immanent reflection of each content upon itself implies a further determination of said content, which thus transcends itself through the critical individuation of its own limits and the speculative redetermination of what it really is. Basically, the trans-containment relation that I have tried to make explicit is nothing but what Hegel defines as *Reflexion in sich*, an *in sich gehen* of the concept exploring a content that is, at the same time, an *Außersichgehen*: a thought of something that, by being contained in that very something (containment: the immanent character of dialectic), is the simultaneous transcending of the content itself, not as something beyond the said content but as something beyond its limits and one-sided truth (transcendence: the critical and speculative character of dialectic).

In this sense, the vocation of Hegel's philosophy is immanently metaphilosophical. Each determination, each logical content and each philosophical position in Hegel's system is inherently oriented to be in dialogue with itself, to reflect upon itself, to define its limits and to rearticulate itself in a new configuration. Therefore, Hegel's immanent philosophical reflection always ends up transcending itself in a meta-order

that, far from losing the philosophical character of the investigation, radicalizes it and places it at the very centre of the dialectical movement.³³

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to make explicit the metaphilosophical value of Hegel's philosophical project by focusing specifically on the definition, explication and legitimation of the philosophical and metaphilosophical method. My analysis was based on Hegel's mature system, leaving aside the phenomenological path. This is not a risk-free choice because the Hegelian justification of the concept of philosophical science seems to belong to this path. At the beginning of logic, in relation to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel stated the following:

This path traverses all the forms of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and its result is the *concept of science*. There is no need, therefore, to justify this concept here ... It has already been justified in the other work, and would indeed not be capable of any other justification than is produced by consciousness as all its shapes dissolve into that concept as into their truth.

(SL, 28)

Phenomenology is thus the justification of the scientific nature of philosophy and functions as *proof of the definition of science*.³⁴ This result corresponds to the beginning of the scientific system, which is the unity of being and thought, of certainty and truth. Nevertheless, this definition is still immediate – it is the condition of possibility for the development of science, and it reaches its complete deployment as well as its full mediation and justification only with the conclusion of the system itself. In particular, I focused on Hegel's logical system because logic exposes the concept of science in its pure form. As Hegel points out, 'the exposition of that which alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself' (SL, 33).³⁵

To sum up, we could say, with Hegel, that *Phenomenology* gives us the content of the concept of science, which is available at the beginning of the system, while logic shows us 'the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content' (SL, 33) – that is, content's pure form and its method, which is scientifically known and justified via the investigation of the whole articulations of this form. To know this form is to know the method of the system, and to know this method means to justify and legitimate it.³⁶

On the last page of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explicitly claims that the concept of science is already given at the beginning of the system, but it is only at the end of the *Logic*, in the knowledge of the absolute idea, that this concept can be truly known, legitimated and grounded:

In the sphere of being, at the beginning of its *content*, its concept appears as a knowledge external to that content in subjective reflection. But in the idea of

absolute cognition, the concept has become the idea's own content. The idea is itself the pure concept that has itself as its subject matter and which, as it runs itself as subject matter through the totality of its determinations, builds itself up to the entirety of its reality, to the system of science, and concludes by apprehending this conceptual comprehension of itself, hence by sublating its position as content and subject matter and cognizing the concept of science.

(SL, 752)

Only at the end of *Logic* is the concept of science properly justified, by means of an unorthodox metaphilosophical approach, precisely because the concept has fully developed its constitutive relationship with what I have called *trans-containment*. On the one hand, in the absolute idea, the concept of science becomes, as Hegel writes, the specific 'content', the specific 'subject matter', of the idea, of the knowledge that has to know itself and, therefore, legitimates itself as properly scientific. On the other hand, precisely this assumption of science itself as the object of its own philosophical investigation implies that speculative thought places itself also at a level that is different from the one of the object being investigated, transcending itself in what Hegel calls an *aufzuheben* of its position as content.

Does this suggest that Hegel's dialectical method and the trans-containment relation function as the universal and necessary method of philosophy and of metaphilosophy itself? Yes and no. The lesson that Hegel teaches us, I think, is that philosophy can never be identified with a determinate given proposal; rather, philosophy is always an activity that is necessarily driven to reflect upon itself to continuously reveal, make explicit and transcend its own limits. Therefore, a truly Hegelian metaphilosophical project would be inevitably oriented to putting philosophy in dialogue with its whole history and ready to challenge each given philosophical proposal and method, even the Hegelian one.

Notes

- 1 For some general information about metaphilosophy and its history and for some considerations regarding the necessity of a Hegelian reform of standard metaphilosophy, see Miolli's contribution, Chapter 26, in this volume.
- 2 See also SL, 46: 'But to want to clarify the nature of cognition *prior* to science is to demand that it should be discussed *outside* science, and *outside* science this cannot.' (The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation. The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.)
- 3 In my analysis, I could have carried out a *comparative investigation* (e.g. Beiser 1987) by considering Hegel's conception of philosophy alongside other views pertaining to the philosophical context of his time. For example, I could have taken into account the problem of criticism and meta-criticism (Kant, Hamann, Herder), the romantic philosophy of philosophy (Schlegel), the distinction between philosophy and non-philosophy (Jacobi) and so on. I could even have considered the problem of Hegel's conception of philosophy from a *genealogical perspective* (e.g. Schäfer 2001), starting

from Hegel's critical attitude towards philosophy during his formative years, passing through the attribution of a critical task to philosophical reflection during the Jena phase – which is when Hegel made explicit the need to build a new paradigm of rationality and a new paradigm of philosophy – and ending up with Hegel's mature philosophy, where this new philosophical proposal, along with a new conception of philosophy, was articulated completely. I do not deny the theoretical relevance of the comparative and/or genealogical investigation. Nevertheless, in the space of a chapter, the systematic strategy, I think, gets straight to the point. In fact, my aim is not only to make explicit Hegel's mature conception of philosophy (something that could be the result of the comparative and genealogical strategies) but also to unfold the implications of this conception with respect to the contemporary debate on metaphilosophy. In this sense, the analysis of the relation between the form and content as well as the object and method of philosophy is a priority. Therefore, to shed full light on Hegel's revolutionary conception of philosophy in relation to these issues, one cannot avoid a systematic focus on the main points of Hegel's mature conception of dialectic.

- 4 Interestingly, Desmond points out that also for Hegel 'grammar is ... a propaedeutic to his ontological logic' (2020: 349).
- 5 The metaphysical function of dialectic was anticipated in neo-Platonism (see Rescher 2006: 139).
- 6 'Heraklit faßt nun das Absolute selbst als diesen Prozeß, als Dialektik selbst auf. ... Das ist das erste Konkrete, das Absolute als in ihm die Einheit Entgegengesetzter' (VGP I, 319–320).
- 7 See Berti (1987: 8).
- 8 See SL, 27.
- 9 In this sense, Hegel takes distance from the modern instrumental notion of method, which can be traced back to Descartes: 'By "a method" ... I understand certain and easy rules – rules such that, if one has followed them exactly, then one will never supposed anything false to be true, and ... one will arrive at the true knowledge of all those things of which one will be capable' (Descartes 1998: 85).
- 10 'The absolute method ... does not behave in this manner of external reflection but takes the determinate from its subject matter, for it is itself its immanent principle and its soul' (SL, 741). One could object that Hegel himself provides a general model and justification of the dialectical method, for example in §§80–81 and 82 of the *Encyclopaedia* or in the introduction and the final chapter of his *Logic*. Nevertheless, Hegel claims that 'what is anticipated in this Introduction, therefore, is not intended to ground as it were the concept of logic, or to justify in advance its content and method scientifically, but rather to make more intuitible, by means of some explanations and reflections of an argumentative and historical nature, the standpoint from which this science ought to be considered' (SL, 23). In the absolute idea section of the *Logic*, the treatment of the method corresponds to the analysis of the universal form of the content that had been investigated earlier (SL, 736).
- 11 It is important to clarify the difference between my use of the expression 'make explicit' and Brandom's use of this phrase (see, for example, Brandom 2019). My idea of dialectic as a process of rendering explicit conceptual content is more radical than Brandom's notion. While Brandom takes up Hegel's thought in search of a support for his semantic inferentialist view, my reading of the dialectic is not limited to semantics because I take Hegel's mature system to have both metaphysical and epistemological value. The semantic relevance of Hegel's investigation is, for me,

implied but not a priority. Moreover, I take Hegel's presuppositionless programme seriously: in the dialectical unfolding of the content of a determination, no theory, no principle and no law is *a priori* assumed as valid; Brandom's revival of Hegel's project cannot support such a position.

- 12 According to Houlgate (2005: 35–36), this is 'a powerful *a priori* analysis of the minimal meaning of determinacy ... The method of Hegel's logic is nothing other than the way in which the thought of indeterminacy determines itself to become the thought of other categories.'
- 13 In the VGP, Hegel claims the following: 'jede Philosophie notwendig gewesen ist ... so ist keine Philosophie widerlegt worden. Was widerlegt worden, ist nicht das Prinzip dieser Philosophie, sondern nur dies, daß dies Prinzip das Letzte, die absolute Bestimmung sei' (VGP I, 56).
- 14 This is the core of Hegel's notion of determinate negation, according to which 'negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content ... that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives' (SL, 33).
- 15 For example, see Rescher (2006: 75–93).
- 16 For a detailed analysis of Hegel's treatment of the analytic method, see Di Riccio (2019: 81–103).
- 17 In the VGP, in the section dedicated to Aristotle, Hegel describes the analytic method as follows: 'Aristoteles nimmt nun den Gegenstand, den er behandelt, auf und betrachtet ihn, was für einzelne Bestimmungen daran vorkommen ... Von dieser Reihe geht er dazu über, sie denkend zu betrachten; und dies Bestimmen des Gegenstandes nach den verschiedenen Seiten, so daß der Begriff daraus hervorgeht, der spekulative Begriff, die einfache Bestimmung' (VGP II, 146–147).
- 18 'This is the standpoint on which *Locke* and all empiricists stand' (EL, §227 A).
- 19 'Er [Locke] sagt: Der Verstand ist in Rücksicht seiner einfachen Formen (*modes*) ... ganz passiv' (VGP III, 217).
- 20 'Thus, for example, the chemist brings a piece of meat to his test-tube, breaks it down in a variety of ways, and then says that he has found that it consists of nitrogen, carbon, hydrogen, and so on. However, these abstract bits of material are then no longer meat' (EL, §227). Similarly, in the second position of thought with respect to objectivity, Hegel claims the following: 'Analysis is, however, the progression from the immediacy of perception to thought, insofar as the determinations, which the object analysed contains amalgamated within itself, receive the form of universality by being separated. Because empiricism analyses objects, it is in error if it believes that it leaves them as they are, since it in fact transforms the concrete into something abstract' (EL, §38 A).
- 21 See Rescher (2006: 12).
- 22 'No given object is capable of being the foundation to which the absolute form would relate as only an external and accidental determination' (SL, 737).
- 23 'If the content is again assumed as given to the method and of a nature of its own, then method, so understood, is just like the logical realm in general a merely *external* form' (SL, 736).
- 24 'In cognition as enquiry, the method likewise occupies the position of an *instrument*, as a means that stands on the side of the subject, connecting it with the object. The subject in this syllogism is one extreme, the object is the other, and in conclusion the subject unites through its method with the object without, however, *uniting with*

- itself* there. The extremes remain diverse, because subject, method and object are not posited as *the one identical concept*; the syllogism is therefore always the formal syllogism; the premise in which the subject posits the form on its side as its method is an *immediate* determination and contains therefore the determinations of the form' (SL, 737–738).
- 25 'But philosophy ought not to be a narrative of what happens, but a cognition of what is *true* in what happens, in order further to comprehend on the basis of this truth what in the narrative appears as a mere happening' (SL, 519).
 - 26 See Quante (2018).
 - 27 As I will show, Hegel would agree with Williamson's criticism of the notion of metaphilosophy: 'I also rejected the word "metaphilosophy." The philosophy of philosophy is automatically part of philosophy, just as the philosophy of anything else is, whereas metaphilosophy sounds as though it might try to look down on philosophy from above, or beyond' (Williamson 2007: ix).
 - 28 For a detailed analysis of the three meanings, see Miolli, Chapter 26, in this volume.
 - 29 'First-order philosophical inquiry includes such disciplines as epistemology, ontology, ethics, and value theory. It thus constitutes the main activity of philosophers, past and present. The philosophical study of first-order philosophical inquiry raises philosophical inquiry to a higher order. Such higher-order inquiry is metaphilosophy' (Audi 1995: 561).
 - 30 Hegel is not alone. The undermining of the rigid distinction between first- and second-order philosophy represents an internal trend in metaphilosophical studies themselves: 'The division between first-order and second order studies has lost some of its popularity, and philosophers now find it more difficult to draw a sharp distinction between metaphilosophy and philosophy' (Bunnin and Yu 2004: 427).
 - 31 'According to Hegel, the concept is realized in each of its expressions. In so far as each part refers on beyond itself to the whole, the whole is implicit in every part, and every part encompasses the whole ... According to Hegel, the form of the Idea is the method, or structure, of self-containment, by which the universal totality is contained within each of its component parts, such that every part is an expression of the whole' (Ware 1999: 12).
 - 32 'Sempre mantenendo la nozione di *self-containment*, potremmo leggere il rapporto tra la filosofia e la metafilosofia hegeliane come quel tipo di rapporto che c'è tra la forma logica – la forma assoluta – e il suo contenuto: essa non si applica a un materiale esterno, al contrario, sono le determinazioni in cui essa stessa si svolge a costituirne il contenuto' (Miolli 2017: 122).
 - 33 This metaphilosophical activity implicit in Hegel's thought is, as I said, not a philosophy *on* philosophy but a philosophy *within* philosophy. This would express what Rorty (1992) correctly recognized as a constitutive trait of both philosophy and metaphilosophy, whereby each is always and necessarily involved in the activity of the other: there is no philosophical activity without some sort of conception of what philosophy is, and all metaphilosophical projects are always and necessarily based on some sort of philosophical presupposition concerning their contents and, especially, methods.
 - 34 I partly agree with Theunissen when he identifies Hegel's metaphilosophy with the phenomenological path: 'die *Phänomenologie* als metaphilosofische Theorie verstehen muss, *wenn* man sowohl ihrer Systemexternalität als auch ihrer selbständigen Begründungsrelevanz Rechnung tragen will. Unter einer metaphilosofischen Theorie wird eine Theorie über Philosophie verstanden, die

ihrem Selbstverständnis nach von philosophischer Theorie bildung argumentativ unabhängig ist, zugleich aber für diese begründungsrelevant sein will' (Theunissen 2014: 10). If we rely on the standard conception of metaphilosophy and try to locate a metaphilosophy in Hegel's project, the *Phenomenology* is the only option. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown that it is possible to call into question, precisely in a Hegelian manner, the independence of philosophy from philosophical investigation. If I am right, one must inevitably consider the development of absolute method in Hegel's *Logic*.

- 35 A thorough study of the problems in question should consider Hegel's complete mature work, with a special focus, I think, on the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and the last section of the *Encyclopaedia*, dedicated to absolute spirit, as well as the very last part on philosophy. On the one hand, examining the *Lectures* would reveal Hegel's conception of philosophy in action in his own analysis of philosophy's development along with philosophy's history. On the other hand, the consideration of absolute spirit would shed light on the specificity of the philosophical form of the comprehension of truth (for some considerations on Hegel's method in these two works, see Nuzzo 2003). Nevertheless, as my aim is to locate Hegel's implicit metaphilosophical conception of philosophical method, I decided to investigate the place where the method is first presented and justified, which is equivalent, as Hegel says, to the place where the concept of science is displayed in its pure form.
- 36 'It also follows that what constitutes the beginning, because it is something still undeveloped and empty of content, is not yet truly known at that beginning, and that only science, and science fully developed, is the completed cognition of it, replete with content and finally truly grounded' (SL, 49).

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Hegel's Metaphilosophy as Immanent Critique

Eleonora Cugini

Introduction

Hegel gave us much to think about on the status, meaning, role and significance of philosophy. Encouraged by Kant's critical philosophy and its reception in particular by Fichte and Schelling, Hegel constantly strove to develop a philosophy that was above all capable of thinking itself and therefore think the absolute, specifically, freedom. Throughout his life, Hegel constantly and continuously compared and analysed the state of philosophy. His famous statement: 'Dichotomy (*Entzweiung*) is the source of the need of philosophy' (DIFF., 89; DIFF., W2, 20) in his introductory notes from *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801) attest to this. But not just there. Time and again, he elaborates in the prefaces and introductions on philosophy's status: in the *Introduction on The Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular* (1802), the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the *Science of Logic* (1812 and 1831), the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), the *Encyclopaedia* (1830) and, not to mention, the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

Hegel has written some of perhaps the most outstanding philosophical prefaces in which he intends to show the method of speculative philosophy and the way in which it confronts itself each time with its objects – despite his position on an introduction's inability to precede a philosophical work or system because it would be like wanting to 'learn to swim, before venturing into the water' (EL, §10 R).¹

Hegel's metaphilosophy – the thought that thinks itself – should in fact not be understood as a methodological premise but rather as the scientific presupposition itself to be able to philosophize: so that Reason can understand the world and thus recognize itself in the world, within the variegated covering of what is temporal and transient.²

The work that puts this objective *par excellence* into practice is the *Science of Logic*, which is 'the most difficult science' (EL, §19 R). It is the introduction and method, in the sense of ingress and crossing (*metà odòn*), of the system of which it is at the same time part of, proposing itself as the 'total reworking' (SL, 3; WdL, W5, 46)³ of logic and 'older metaphysics', but also as the 'true critique' (SL, 42; WdL, W5, 62) of the position of extrinsic thought 'that abstracts and therefore separates, that remains

fixed in its separations' (SL, 25; WdL, W5, 38).⁴ Already in *The Difference* Hegel wrote that 'the sole interest of Reason is to suspend such rigid antitheses' (DIFF., 90; DIFF., W2, 21) but not the dichotomy as such: 'for the necessary dichotomy is One factor in life. Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy [*in der höchsten Lebendigkeit*] is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission' (DIFF., 91; DIFF., W2, 21–22). Again, in the *Introduction on The Essence of Philosophical Criticism* Hegel returns to specify the importance of the dichotomy:

In this way the antithesis of dualism is given its most abstract expression and so philosophy is not led forth from the sphere of our reflective culture [*Reflexionskultur*]. As a result the most abstract form of the antithesis is of the greatest importance; and from this most acute extreme, the transition to genuine philosophy is all the easier. For the very idea of the Absolute that is set up itself rejects the antithesis, because the antithesis carries with it the form of an Idea, of an Ought, of an infinite requirement.

(PC, 282; PK, W2, 181)

And a little further on:

This tedium [the antithesis of dualism] was bound to at least arouse a yearning of the [dead] riches for a spark of fire, for a concentration of living intuition, and, once the cognition of the dead had gone on long enough, for that cognition of the living which is only possible through Reason. Belief in the possibility of such an actual cognition, and not just in the negative wandering along or the perennial springing up of new forms, is absolutely necessary if the effect to be expected from a critique of them is to be a true one, i.e., not a merely negative destruction of these limited forms, but one that results in a preparation of the way for the arrival of true philosophy ... When criticism itself wants to maintain a one-sided point of view as valid against others that are likewise one-sided, it becomes partisan polemic.

(PC, 285; PK, W2, 186)

If the standpoint of understanding of critical philosophy requires the greatest strength 'to hold fast what is dead' (PS, 19; PhG, W3, 36)⁵ of that which remains fixed in its abstract separations and reducing criticism to 'partisan polemic', Reason's perspective on speculative philosophy recovers instead the same force of life, that is, the force 'to hold and endure contradiction'⁶ of the 'identity of identity and non-identity', or 'its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission'. From this point of view, speculative philosophy would be the *true* critical philosophy. A true critique that is not resolved in a partisan polemic but in an emancipatory process of self-realization as immanent to reality and not separate from it.

In this chapter, I will try to show in what sense Hegel's philosophy is essentially critical and how it is possible to understand the 'critique' starting from Hegelian philosophy. In doing so, I propose a comparison with the method of immanent critique developed by Rahel Jaeggi in the context of Critical Theory. This method strives to

interpret Hegel's immanent critique not only from the point of view of immanent normative standards but above all as a transformative experience. A comparison with the long tradition of interpretations of Hegel's immanent critique as a transformative process would deserve a separate specific treatment.⁷

Here I would like to anticipate that the focus on the comparison with Jaeggi's method aims to show how Hegel's Doctrine of Essence can be understood as immanent critique, that is, as a transformative and emancipatory process of self-determination or self-realization. This contribution aims to show how in the Doctrine of Essence, such a process develops as a critique of those extrinsic but also immanent determinations, standards or norms (*Sollen*) that crystallize this process. However, this chapter points out that this means understanding immanent critique as a 'standard' precisely because it determines the transformative process of self-realization and thus of emancipation or freedom.

The critical essence of Hegel's philosophy

Hegel's speculative method seems to be configured as a metaphilosophy because it is based on that 'need of philosophy' produced by the separation which has been determined between philosophical reflection and its contents. Such a need of philosophy would seem to consist in a thought that thinks itself, not to eliminate that separation but to transform it into something '*wirklich und lebendig*' (effective and living).

If it is therefore possible to recognize a metaphilosophical approach in Hegel, such an approach appears to be essentially critical and in particular that of an immanent emancipatory critique.⁸

An immanent emancipatory critique starting from Hegel's philosophy involves not only an overturning (*Umkehrung*) of the philosophical point of view but also an inversion of the very essence of the content or objects of philosophy. The dialectic between philosophy (as subject) and its object does not therefore take place in a univocal – or one-sided – epistemological direction, but rather in a mutual relationship (as 'mutual recognition') – in which the epistemological and ontological plane are not separated – which continuously acts on the terms at stake by transforming them.

Thus, Hegel's philosophy can be understood as essentially critical because it shows that 'critique' is the essence not only of philosophy but also of the world and reality in which philosophy is the mode of understanding. But what does it mean that critique is the essence? What does it mean that such essence is vital and effective? To provide an answer to these questions I will initially turn to the Doctrine of Essence, in the *Science of Logic*, as a 'true critique' of an extrinsic position of thought, that is, of that position that holds fast the finite as something dead because it presupposes essence and identity as the empty tautology of the I=I.

Although *Science of Logic* is considered by Hegel as a true critique, it is rarely referred to in that theoretical-critical debate surrounding Hegelian philosophy. Although *Science of Logic* is considered by Hegel as a true critique, it is rarely taken into account in that theoretical-critical debate surrounding Hegelian philosophy.

Only a few scholars have dealt with its practical implications by venturing into that difficult terrain where the risk of flattening the Logic – ‘the Realm of Shadow’ (SL, 37; WdL, W5, 55) – on the objective spirit or vice versa is always just around the corner.⁹

I think that it is worth venturing into such difficult terrain. By following up on the critical method set out in *The Science of Logic* I will try to show how the risk of dealing with its essential practical implications such as a flattening or a simplification can be reduced.

In the Doctrine of Essence Hegel presents the essence as the relationship between being and concept, namely as the sphere of mediation of the concept with itself.¹⁰ The Doctrine of Essence reaches the most vertiginous stages of Hegelian dialectics and shows its beating heart – that relational core, sometimes magmatic, yet structural – which is fully realized in the Doctrine of Concept, where the process of the understanding of essence¹¹ as the ‘truth of being’ is exposed.¹²

Everything in Hegel's philosophy is played out in the Doctrine of Essence: it is the *pars destruens* as a critique of the ‘older metaphysics’, but at the same time this critique is not merely destructive. In the Essence, Hegel seems to confront himself directly with the critical method showing that critique is not an epistemological attitude but a determining negation of essence itself.¹³

The first act when questioning essence is reflection: essence presents itself as the being that is reflected in itself. But this reflection in itself of being is nothing other than the thought that is reflected in being, in an interplay of interiority and exteriority that will accompany the whole development of the Essence.

Its [essence's] movement consists in positing negation or determination in being, thereby giving itself *existence* and becoming as infinite being-for-itself what it is in itself. It thus gives itself its *existence* which is *equal* to its being-in-itself and becomes *concept*. For the concept is the absolute as it is absolutely, or in and for itself, in its existence. But the existence which essence gives to itself is not yet existence as it is in and for itself but as essence *gives* it to itself or as *posited*, and *hence still distinct*¹⁴ from the existence of the concept.

(SL, 339; WdL, W6, 16)

Essence is the movement of internalization of the being, as a movement of self-determination, which performs as a movement of externalization *for* the concept: the externalization of the essence is therefore *still distinct* from the existence of the concept.

From the internalization of reflection in itself that produces the determinations of being (identity, difference and contradiction), passing through the appearance of existence as a phenomenon, the essence finally manifests itself as *actuality* – *Wirklichkeit* – as identity of interiority and externality. Yet *Wirklichkeit*, the actual reality that rises at the end of the path of Essence, is still different, says Hegel, from the reality of the concept.

What I intend to show by starting from Hegel is that essence can be understood as the non-coincidence of actual reality and its concept. Such non-coincidence is actual (*wirklich*) and vital (*lebendig*) and as such is ‘the truth of being’ as speculative thinking knows it.

Following Hegel's take on the category of 'contradiction' and then on '*Wirklichkeit*', I will try to show how the 'being still different' of concept's reality brings forth essence as a process of immanent, vital and critical realization of freedom.

The force to hold and endure contradiction within

The first three determinations of essence as reflection are identity, difference and contradiction. These three determinations are part of a dialectical process aimed at showing identity as a contradictory relationship in itself in which the difference, namely the negative, is the very determination of identity. For this reason, identity can be understood as a self-contradictory relationship.¹⁵ Identity, to be such, cannot stand in an 'empty tautology of $A=A$ '¹⁶ but must self-produce itself, self-determine itself as self-contradictory and, for this reason, must admit in itself a principle of alteration and motion.

Thus, identity would consist in *not* being the *non-identity*: determined by the non-being of its non-being. Therefore, *identity is essentially a relationship*, that is, it is a relationship determined by the determination of self-identity. In this way Hegel shows the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of difference, or negation, as *one-sided*: it is the one-sidedness of separation that does not allow it to grasp contradiction as the essence of both the objects of thought and of thought itself, and that, in this way, ends up by admitting the unknowability of the essence. But excluding the contradiction and admitting the unknowability of the essence means above all not being able to think life and therefore the finite.

Abstract self-identity is not yet vitality; but the positive, since implicitly it is negativity, goes out of itself and sets its alteration in motion. Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself: indeed, force is this, to hold and endure contradiction within.

(SL, 382; WdL, W6, 76)

'The positive, since implicitly it is negativity' is the finite, something determined: 'a being which is only "falling", a being inherently self-contradictory' (SL, 385; WdL, W6, 79) – and it is because of the contradictory structure of the finite that the whole dialectical process is triggered.¹⁷ The speculative standpoint lingers in this contradiction, it cannot solve it in the nothing of mere 'falling', it must endure the living structure of the finite: 'The usual *horror* which ordinary (not speculative) thought has of contradiction (as nature has of the *vacuum*) rejects this consequence, for it remains at the one-sided consideration that contradiction *resolves* into *nothing* without recognizing its positive side where it becomes *absolute activity* and absolute ground' (SL, 384; WdL, W6, 78).

Hegel introduces thereby a strong concept of change within the 'Realm of shadows' – the Logic – understood as activity, as a practice of self-determination. The category of contradiction – which intends to explain the finite as vital and knowable in its essence – is where Hegel seems to confront the age-old question of the relationship

between *poiesis* and *prâxis* in regard to the difference between *zoé* and *bíos*. At the end of the Doctrine of Essence, this will allow us to treat *Wirklichkeit* as an actual reality characterized by *wirken*, by action as *prâxis*.¹⁸ The pages of Hegel's *Logic* dedicated to contradiction seem to echo Aristotle's statement: 'life (*bíos*) is *prâxis* not *poiesis*' (Politics, 1254 a7) and it seems that Hegel's approach not only tends to sublimate the dualism between *poiesis* and *prâxis* in the direction of *prâxis* but also the one between *zoé* and *bíos* in the direction of *bíos*. One could say that for the speculative standpoint there is an irreducibility of the living – any living being – to a 'mere' biological life, mere *zoé*.

In fact, life as such turns out to be the force to endure contradiction. Thus, life is for the thought that is capable of lingering in that contradiction and grasping it as the essence of the finite, recognizing itself in it. In this way Hegel shows how contradiction resolves itself and becomes 'ground': the resolution of contradiction consists in its sublation as only reflective determination and in its becoming a 'real' mediation of the essence with itself. The essence, therefore, turns out to be 'the absolute repelling of itself within itself' (SL, 386; WdL, W6, 80): 'In determining itself as ground, essence determines itself as the not-determined, and only the sublation of its being determined is its determining. – Essence, in thus being determined as self-sublating, does not proceed from an other but is, in its negativity, identical with itself' (SL, 386; WdL, W6, 80–81).

For Hegel, the essence is not separated from what it is the essence of: it is the foundation – the *raison d'être* – specifically, the process of self-determination as much of each finite as of the multiplicity of the finite as of the unity of that multiplicity.

The contradiction of actuality

It is a *de-substantialization* process of the essence that Hegel exposes in his writings. This process rests upon the constitutive negation of the finite, which determines it as vital, as alteration, as self-contradictory, as the process of realizing itself outside of itself. Moreover, such de-substantialization of the essence also exposes the essential multiplicity and pluralism of the finite. This seems to be the meaning of *Wirklichkeit* at the end of the development of the Essence: *Wirklichkeit* is reality as manifestation of the essence, which cannot but manifest itself, cannot but realize itself in its exteriority, since it is the very activity of self-realization as much of the multiplicity of the finite as of their unity produced by their own self-sublation.

Wirklichkeit not only exposes the unity of determinations but also the very multiplicity and plurality of determinations, each one actual (*wirklich*) precisely because it is a unity of form and content, of activity and determination: 'Real actuality [*die reale Wirklichkeit*] is as such at first the thing of many properties, the concretely existing world' (SL, 482; WdL, W6, 208). Such plurality is contingent because it is a multiplicity of diversity, of finites, of multiple self-contradictory determinations. But it is precisely such contingency, such mutual self-determination, that is what manifests itself as necessity, that is essence as immanent negativity. This is why Hegel can claim that: 'this *contingency* is rather absolute necessity; it is the *essence* of those

free, inherently necessary actualities' (SL, 488; WdL, W6, 216) as the finite as such, the finite as it ends, is 'the absolute's *own exposition*, its movement in itself which, in its externalization [*Entäußerung*], reveals itself instead' (SL, 488; WdL, W6, 217).

It is indeed the absolute, the determining constitutive negation of the finite, that at this stage of the Essence manifests itself in a very specific way: it cannot but recognize itself in the finite.

This negative breaks forth in them [the multiplicity of finites] because being, through this same negativity which is its essence, is self-contradiction; it will break forth against this being in the form of being, hence as the *negation* of those actualities, a negation *absolutely different* from their being; it will break forth as their *nothing*, as an *otherness* which is just as *free* towards them as their being is free. – Yet this negative was not to be missed in them [*Jedoch war es an ihnen nicht zu verkennen*].

(SL, 488; WdL, W6, 216)

The being that Hegel deals with in the above-mentioned passage of Essence, then, is determined as the negative substance or unit of those determinations. This unity is configured as in contradiction with itself because it is the negation of the determinations. Yet, this is precisely the structure of the determinations: in this way the relationship between the determinations and their unity is a relationship of *recognition*, which is expressed not as *Anerkennung* but in a negative formula capable of expressing the logical-ontological necessity. This negative unity, as a substance, also shows itself as a relationship of mutual causality in which the substance and the parts (the absolute and the finites) cause each other: they produce each other, thus showing the sublation of the relation of causality. This is how substance de-substantializes itself and necessity becomes freedom. 'This *inwardness* or this in-itself sublates the movement of causality; the result is that the substantiality of the sides that stand in relation is lost, and necessity unveils itself. Necessity does not come to be *freedom* by vanishing but in that its still only *inner* identity is *manifested*' (SL, 504; WdL, W6, 239).

The Actuality, at the end of the Essence, shows the essence as a modality of actual relationship between being and thought. This happens through a progressive fracture of the being in itself, which is also that of thought in itself, unhinging both a substantialistic position of being and an idealistic position of thought:¹⁹ the essence brings forth in its highest fulfilment the *Entzweiung*, the dichotomy between being and thought – not eliminating it, but enlivening it, making it constitutive and necessary for their relationship.

It seems that it is here that the essential criticism of Hegel's philosophy is rooted: the effectual reality is the process of the de-essentialization of the essence and precisely for this reason it is the starting point for the Concept as it exposes itself to the Concept. Actuality is what keeps being and thought in relation, it is the suffering of being and a scandal for thought, it is what continuously produces the contradictory unity of differences, what urges thought not to linger on a quiescent identity with

itself. The Doctrine of Essence therefore seems to show the core of the critical process and therefore allows us to understand what the 'true' critique and its immanence consists of: true critique, according to Hegel, would seem to consist in dismantling the crystallization of dualisms based on the presupposition of a self-referred subjectivity (*hypokeímenon*), so that thought can think of itself in the world as a process of realization of freedom.

The 'strong' variant of Rahel Jaeggi's immanent critique

In the contemporary theoretical-critical debate it is above all Rahel Jaeggi who has specified and deepened in transformative terms the method of immanent critique starting from Hegel's philosophy.²⁰ Jaeggi points out how modern societies are dominated by the separation between the individual and the collective spheres and how such a separation is eminently manifested in a division between morality and ethics: between the sphere of what is right – the Right – and the sphere of what is good – the social institutions in which collective freedom is realized. Jaeggi explains that the separation between these two spheres is due to the neoliberal standpoint according to which it would be morally right, in the name of ethical pluralism, to maintain a neutrality on what is good, which would remain the exclusive concern of individual preferences. Starting from this liberal approach to the separation between the individual and collective sphere, Jaeggi aims to put the ethical dimension of forms of life – understood as 'bundles (or ensembles) of social practices' (Jaeggi 2018: 73) – back at the centre of the debate, not only recovering the tradition of Critical Theory – according to which it is necessary to grasp within social dynamics the conditions for emancipation and the realization of freedom – but also developing a method with reference to Hegel's philosophy (in particular to *Phenomenology* and *Sittlichkeit* of the objective spirit).

Jaeggi's elaboration is developed within the issue of normativity, which consists of the disposition of norms (standards) to establish what is right or good and what is not as well as what is the source of the obligation of such standards.²¹ The critical method has to deal with such problems to not risk falling either into a neutral approach (abstaining from discussing the ethical standards) or into a form of ideology (salvaging normative moments already existing in social life).

Jaeggi therefore develops an immanent critical method not from the standpoint of the 'norms', but rather from the standpoint of their immanence as a condition of forms of life themselves: 'To put it in Hegelian terms, the question here is whether a given social formation corresponds to its concept or not' (Jaeggi 2018: 169).

To avoid the potential risk of paternalism or perfectionism inherent in the idea of 'correspondence to the concept', Jaeggi notes that immanent critique is negative: it is 'problem-focused and crisis-oriented' (Jaeggi 2015: 14) and yet is not merely deconstructive.²²

First of all, the immanence of critique consists not only in a self-critique but above all in the same crisis or contradiction that arises in a social formation. Such crises are the 'negative' standards of the immanent critique.

Immanent criticism (in the 'strong' variant that I defend here) finds its standards 'in what is criticized itself' in a very different sense from internal criticism. It does not adopt a positive stance on the potentials it finds in what exists. The norm to be realized is not already present in reality as an ideal; hence, *its realization is not something that can be called for in a correspondingly straightforward way.*

(Jaeggi 2018: 364; my emphasis)

Such negative determination is immanent in the 'strong' sense that it takes on a real transformative charge. 'Rather, this form of criticism is immanent in the sense that it addresses, in a negativistic way, the internal contradictions and moments of crisis that constitute a particular constellation. Here immanence is conceived in transformative terms' (Jaeggi 2018: 364).

Forms of life are exposed to immanent critique when a problem arises in them or when they fail or face a crisis. Crises and contradictions are immanent transformative instances, according to Jaeggi, and the transformation involves 'problem-solving processes' (Jaeggi 2018: 242) that are determined not only as necessary but also as productive.

But at the same time, the transformation that proceeds from such criticism has an immanent character: it springs in an immanent way from the higher-order problems posed with a social formation. Then immanent criticism connects up with what is given in a constellation to the extent that the means for solving the problem or the crisis are located in this situation itself. Thus, the transformation process is suggested by the situation itself to a certain extent; it is prefigured in the situation, even if it exceeds the latter. Immanent criticism construes the crisis-prone contradiction that confronts it and confronts us not only as necessary but also – in contrast to the procedure of internal criticism – as productive. The deficiency of a particular position can be shown only by its failure; however, the possibility of resolving it follows from criticism of the deficient state itself.

(Jaeggi 2018: 364)

The method of immanent critique developed by Jaeggi²³ not only recovers Hegel's category of 'contradiction' by reworking the role that it plays in the objective spirit.²⁴ It also intends to go beyond Hegel's intentions, overcoming the essentialist risk that Jaeggi recognizes in Hegel's philosophy in which the immanence of contradiction and its being the process of self-determination risk to establish, according to Jaeggi, a too close link between norm and reality, between Ought-to and being. Therefore, Jaeggi, following the interpretation of Hegel by John Dewey and Alasdair MacIntyre and by characterizing the immanent critique as a pragmatist method,²⁵ shows that a normative solution to a normative problem is not already inherent in the problem, but is an attempt – an experiment – that may fail or succeed or that brings with it a new inherent problem or crisis. The open-ended learning process (*Lernprozess*) as an active appropriation of experiences (the Hegelian *Erfahrungsprozess*) also highlights, according to Jaeggi, the necessary pluralism of forms of life and therefore the pluralism of problem-solving experiments.

The immanence of normativity taken up by Hegel²⁶ is precisely what Jaeggi refers to in order to establish the opportunity of a critique of life forms that does not consist in an attempt to reconcile norm (*Sollen*) and practice (*Wirken*). On the contrary, it recognizes their contradictory relationship as a continuous (self-)productive tension.

From a practical point of view then, Jaeggi's interpretation of the correspondence between Actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) and the Concept of forms of life (as a nexus of social practices) seems to be the tension that constitutes the essence of forms of life themselves.

Not to correspond to its concept with regard to social formations then means not to fulfill the tasks posited with the concept and not to solve the historical problems accumulated in the concept. Drawing on the ethical-functional understanding of norms of ethical life developed above, this means that a form of life that does not correspond to its concept does not fulfill its ethically constituted function as this has evolved against the background of a specific problem-solving history. A form of life or a nexus of social practices is then shown to be deficient by the failure and the crisis-proneness of the practices it implies. The erosion of social practices or whole forms of life and their becoming obsolete is both an ethical and a functional failure.

(Jaeggi 2018: 234)

Immanent critique as essential critique

The development of immanent critique provided by Jaeggi has the value and merit of not renouncing an ethical partisanship – that is, of being able to say what the 'good life' consists of without turning into ideology. In particular, the negative and crisis-oriented dimension of such immanent critique that shows it as a problem-solving process grounded in Hegel's notion of 'contradiction', allows us to understand the correspondence of reality to its concept as a process in constant tension and not something pre-established. Jaeggi also points out that this process can fail: if a form of life does not correspond to its concept it is deficient and obsolete. In fact, not corresponding to its concept would mean 'freezing' or 'crystallizing' the process of problem-solving. The 'strong' version of immanent critique thereby provides above all a dismantling of the perfectionist ideal of essence: by not only showing how essence coincides with the same process of self-understanding and self-realization but also how this process is by no means pre-established.

Nevertheless, sometimes in the dim light there seems to remain the critical weight of this process in favour of its characterization in more normative terms. In other words, if Hegel's contradiction is understood as the immanent normative principle that triggers a critical-emancipatory process of problem-solving and not a mere autopoietic process of self-determination,²⁷ the functionalist element (or that of failure) could be misleading.

I think that what remains here is the problem of the contradictory or critical correspondence between concept and reality: a reality that is a process of self-realization

determined by an immanent transformative instance (transformative in a strong sense, as emancipation) and a concept that is the understanding of such a reality, or rather, that is that reality that understands itself. Such immanent contradictory speculative character of such correspondence excludes the dualism between reality and concept and yet does not destroy the dichotomy. Just the opposite: dichotomy shows itself as the immanent negative productive determination of the relationship between reality and concept and therefore of the process of self-realization and transformation.

What I aimed to show by outlining the dialectical process in the Doctrine of Essence is how such a procedural interweaving of reality–essence–self-knowledge is determined by a principle of non-correspondence: reality and concept, in the final analysis, would seem to correspond (or succeed) precisely when they recognize their non-correspondence, while their correspondence – the tautological principle $A=A$ – would be a failure (in critical or speculative terms).

The 'non-correspondence' with itself is in fact the determining principle of the essence as a process. In other words, the essence – as Actuality – seems to correspond with itself by not corresponding with itself and with the Concept. This is precisely what the Concept recognizes.

The Doctrine of Essence therefore seems to offer an important elaboration of the immanent critical method to marginalize not only the risk of essentialism but also that of constructivism.

Wirklichkeit – Actuality – would turn out to be the process of self-realization (of the essence) in which the 'norm', or the Ought-to – *Sollen* – is characterized in negative terms, as what must be overcome in 'action' – *Wirken*. In this way, however, Hegel establishes neither too close a link between *Sollen* (Ought-to) and *Wirken* (action) – making *Sollen* an essential and irenic principle of autopoietic self-determination – nor a splitting of them – making *Wirken* a sort of principle of the 'fury of destruction'. In Essence the correspondence of *Sollen* and *Wirken* rather seems to show the sublation of *Sollen* in *Wirken* as a self-critical self-realization process. In this way the 'norm' seems to be conceivable, albeit negatively or rather critically: as that which limits or interrupts or fails the critical process of self-realization as a process of emancipation.

What makes the critical process fail is therefore a principle of tautological identity that of a non-contradictory identity of being and thinking without critique, which rests on its abstract self-equality.

When the spirit strives towards its centre, it strives to perfect its own freedom; and this striving is fundamental to its nature. To say that spirit exists would at first seem to imply that it is a completed entity. On the contrary, it is by nature active, and *activity is its essence*; it is its own product, and is therefore its own beginning and its own end. *Its freedom does not consist in static being, but in a constant negation of all that threatens to destroy freedom.*

(LPWH, 48; VPWG, 55; both my emphasis)

Starting from the Doctrine of Essence, it is not only possible to understand essence as a critical process of self-realization but also to have a standard for recognizing what

determines this process: speculative identity – identity of identity and non-identity – turns out to be such a standard of critical self-understanding.

The essence, the true critique, proves to be in the last analysis the manifestation of not-coinciding with itself and in this way it is an emancipatory process of self-realization; while the concept, the speculative thinking as 'true critical philosophy', would seem to be the understanding of such contradictions and therefore self-understanding – in a continuous transformative tension.

If Hegel's philosophy is essentially critical precisely because it exposes the essence as a process of de-substantialization, it then leads to a tragic outcome: the essence of the human being is not 'only' a process of self-realization but is such because it is a process of liberation. Such process consists of a continuous self-sublation, a continuous self-hurting in the form of a metaphysical identity, a continuous going out of itself of the thought that thinks itself. 'If to be aware of the idea – to be aware, i.e. that men are aware of freedom as their essence, aim, and object – is matter of *speculation*, still this very idea itself is the actuality of men – not something which they *have*, as men, but which they *are*' (EPM, §482 R).

The Hegelian variant of immanent critique addresses the essence directly and exposes it as the very process of self-realization. In this way the essence loses any 'positive' normative value because it – that which makes something what it is: the identity of being and concept – consists, according to Hegel, precisely in the self-critical process of self-coincidence.

Hegel's immanent critique can contribute to Critical Theory with its 'essentiality'.²⁸ That is, it offers an immanent critical standard that does not reduce critique to either an epistemological²⁹ or ideological attitude. Furthermore, it dispels both individual and social reality as predetermined, as a more or less passive process of adaptation to normative standards.

Indeed, Hegelian Actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) seems to suggest just how the process of self-appropriation – that is, the emancipatory process of realization of freedom – consists in the process of appropriation of the contradiction of the self-non-coincidence.

The implications of such a critical standard are countless. They range from the plane of the relationship between the human being and nature to that between the human being and other human beings, bringing the question of life – or rather of 'good life' – as an essentially political question back to the centre.

Notes

- 1 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
- 2 Cf. PR, 14; GPR, W7, 25: 'If, on the other hand, the Idea is regarded as "only an Idea", as something represented [*eine Vorstellung*] in an opinion, philosophy's insight, by contrast, is that nothing is actual except the Idea. The important thing, then, is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present. For since rationality (which is

synonymous with the Idea) enters into external existence [*Existenz*] simultaneously with its actualization, it emerges with an infinite wealth of forms, shapes and appearances. Around its core it throws a motley covering in which consciousness is initially at home, a covering which the concept has first to penetrate before it can find the inward pulse and feel it still beating in the external shapes.' (Quotes from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* are from Knox's translation).

- 3 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 4 On the critical value of objective logic see, in particular, Theunissen (1978). On the elaboration of Hegel's logic as a remake of metaphysics and ontology, see Fleischmann (1968), Fulda (1991), Houlgate (1999, 2005) and Illetterati (2007).
- 5 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Miller's translation.
- 6 Cf. SL, 382; WdL, W6, 76. On 'life' in Hegel's *Logic*, see Ng (2020) and Achella (2019).
- 7 See Särkelä (2017, 2018) for a reconstruction of the debate around the method of immanent critique that highlights two interpretative traditions: on the one hand (recognized as the prevailing approach of the contemporary Frankfurt School), immanent critique as a 'metacritique' that grounds itself on the quality of the standards employed; on the other hand, immanent critique as a transformative experience that must not find any reason to ground itself because the immanence is the form of critical praxis itself (Dewey is recognized as the prominent interpreter of such a tradition together with Adorno). To mention just a few of the authors who can be counted in this second interpretative tradition, see Adorno (1966), Dove (1970), Bristow (2007) and Dewey (2008a, c). Amongst the most recent reconstructions of the debate on immanent criticism and normativity, see also Khurana and Menke (2011), Stahl (2013) Finlayson (2014), and Khurana (2017).
- 8 There are many authors who have been confronted with this character of Logic since Marx (1983, 2005). See also Lenin's (1976) philosophical notebooks. Marcuse (1989) and Lukács (1978) focus in particular on *Wirklichkeit* in the Doctrine of Essence. On the critical value of objective logic see, in particular, Theunissen (1978). Recently Pippin (2019: 18–31) explicitly treated Hegel's Logic as an 'emancipatory logic'.
- 9 See, for instance, Fleischmann (1964), Henrich (1978), Malabou (1996), Lugarini (1998), Cesarale (2009), Ng (2009), Cortella (2011), Quante (2011), Emundts (2012), Vieweg (2012), Zambrana (2015), Nuzzo (2018), Kervégan (2018) and Manchisi (2019).
- 10 Cf. SL, 40; WdL, W5, 58: 'However, in accordance with the elemental unity which is immanent in the concept as basis, and hence in accordance with the inseparability of the concept's determinations, such determinations, even as *differentiated* (the concept is posited in their *difference*), must also stand at least in reference to each another. There results a sphere of *mediation*, the concept as a system of *reflected determinations*, that is, of being as it passes over into the in-itselfness of the concept – a concept which is in this way not yet posited for itself as such but is also fettered by an immediate being still external to it. This sphere is the *doctrine of essence* that stands between the doctrine of being and of the concept'. Cf. also SL, 339; WdL, W6, 16: 'Essence stands between being and concept; it makes up their middle, its movement constituting the transition of being into the concept. Essence is being-in-and-for-itself, but it is this in the determination of being-in-itself; for its general determination is that it emerges from being or that it is the first negation of being.'
- 11 The emphasis on the genitive is intended to underline its speculative aspect, namely both objective and subjective: of the concept that understands the essence and the concept as the essence that understands itself.

- 12 'The truth of being is essence' (SL, 337; WdL, W6, 13).
- 13 Cf. SL, 42; WdL, W5, 62: 'But objective logic comprises within itself also the rest of metaphysics, the metaphysics which sought to comprehend with the pure forms of thought such particular substrata, originally drawn as the soul, the world, and God, and in this type of consideration the determinations of thought constituted the essential factor. Logic, however, considers these forms free of those substrata, which are the subjects of figurative representation, considers their nature and value in and for themselves. That metaphysics neglected to do this, and it therefore incurred the just reproach that it employed the pure forms of thought uncritically, without previously investigating whether and how they could be the determinations of the thing-in-itself, to use Kant's expression – or more precisely, of the rational. – The objective logic is therefore the true critique of such determinations – a critique that considers them, not according to the abstract form of the a priori as contrasted with the a from the imagination, posteriori, but in themselves according to their particular content.'
- 14 My emphasis.
- 15 The status and role of contradiction in Hegel's philosophy is a controversial and much-debated issue. The debate particularly revolves around the question whether, as Hegel argues, contradiction is what actually determines reality or rather is not limited, as some scholars believe, to the conceptual sphere. That is to say, whether it is resolved and disappears by supporting the Aristotelian principle of 'non-contradiction' or whether its resolution consists of a persistence, overturning into a 'principle of contradiction'. See Bordinon (2015) for a detailed reconstruction of the debate. See also Theunissen (1974), Berti (1977, 1980), Landucci (1978), Chiereghin (1981), Düsing (1984), Baptist (1992), Wolff (1997), Redding (2007), de Boer (2010, 2012) in particular on contradiction and immanent critique in Hegel, Illetterati (2010), the volume published by Ficara (2014) and Pippin (2019).
- 16 Cf. SL, 358; WdL, W6, 41: 'In its positive formulation, $A=A$, this proposition is at first no more than the expression of empty *tautology*.'
- 17 'But the truth is that the absolute is because the finite is the immanently self-contradictory opposition, because it is not. ... The non-being of the finite is the being of the absolute' (SL, 385; WdL, W6, 79–80).
- 18 Cf. SL, 482; WdL, W6, 298: 'What is actual can act; something announces its actuality *by what it produces*.'
- 19 Illetterati (2018) shows how the understanding of *Wirklichkeit* in Hegel's Logic brings with it a critique of both a purely ontological and a purely epistemological approach.
- 20 See Jaeggi (2009, esp. 2018: 339): 'The moments of a form of criticism that adopts an immanent approach which I have assembled here can be found programmatically for the first time in the methodology of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as outlined in its introduction and put into practice in the course of the phenomenological self-examination of consciousness.'
- 21 For a reconstruction of the issue of normativity in relation to both the obligation of the norm and the realization of good or freedom, see Khurana and Menke (2011). The volume collects numerous contributions that allow to frame such an issue starting from Kant and Hegel.
- 22 The method of immanent critique is developed in Jaeggi (2018: 333–373). On the 'negative' character of immanent critique see, in particular, Jaeggi (2018: 366–368; 2009: 285–288).

- 23 Jaeggi's method of immanent critique is developed by confronting Titus Stahl's (2013) take on the matter: 'whose study addresses many of the same questions as mine, although with different results' (Jaeggi 2015: 567, n. 2).
- 24 Jaeggi argues in detail the role of dialectical contradiction in Jaeggi (2018: 441–468).
- 25 Cf. Jaeggi (2015: 25–27) and Jaeggi (2018: 411–492), where the main comparisons are drawn with the positions of Dewey (1983, 2008b) and MacIntyre (1984, 1988).
- 26 Jaeggi (2018: 216–240) develops a close comparison with Hegel, in particular with the final part of the chapter 'Definition' in the Doctrine of Concept, in the *Science of Logic*.
- 27 From my point of view, this seems to be particularly the risk of Khurana's (2017) account of normativity in Hegel's philosophy, which seems to be a reading oriented more in the normative direction of an autopoiesis than in a critical and emancipatory direction, although it is developed within a theoretical-critical framework.
- 28 Neuhouser (2000: 268) points out the difference between a 'radical' or 'revolutionary' approach to Hegelian dialectic. He shows how Critical Theory seems to prefer a 'revolutionary' critique based on Hegel's method as opposed to a 'radical' critique. Neuhouser observes that Hegelian criticism is rather radical in the sense of a critique that tends to find the realization of social freedom within the social institutions.
- 29 Kervégan (2018) exposes Hegel's political philosophy as a political epistemology starting from the interpretation of the famous maxim of the GR 'what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational'.

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Part Two

Hegel's Metaphilosophy and its Aesthetic, Religious and Historical- Political Dimensions

Between the Morning Dawn and the Evening Dusk? On Hegel's Theory of Theoretical Practice

Zdravko Kobe

In the preface to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, signed on 25 June 1820, Hegel closed with the famous passage on the structural belatedness of philosophy: 'When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk' (PR, 23; GPR, GW14.1, 16).¹ This metaphor is often read as Hegel's vindication of philosophical quietism. Since every philosophy is 'its time comprehended in thought', and since it appears 'only at a time when actuality has ... attained its completed state', it simply cannot be turned to the future, let alone assume a leading role in transforming the world. According to this reading, Hegel would seem to understand philosophy as a purely contemplative activity conducted in isolation, leaving almost no imprint on reality.

Hegel did not always defend such an ivory tower view, though. As a young philosopher he wrote to Schelling in 1795 that 'from the Kantian system' he expected 'a revolution in Germany'.² But more importantly, he proposed an apparently activist account of the role of philosophy even in his mature stage. In the opening lecture on natural and state law, delivered on 22 October 1818, Hegel described the present situation in Germany as a 'middle state' between the reign of the rational idea of freedom and the rest of positive rights. In the ensuing 'struggle that [aimed] to equalize the concept of freedom with actuality', he accorded a special place to philosophy, which 'knows' the progress of history: 'Once the spirit of the people has risen to a higher stage, the constitutional elements relating to the previous stages have no footing anymore; they must collapse, and no power is able to hold them. Philosophy thus recognizes that only the rational can happen, whatever external particular phenomena may seem to oppose it' (GW26, 234). Such an engaged view of philosophy transpires also from

the inaugural address in Berlin, delivered only a few hours earlier. After a couple of allusions to the struggle for national liberation, which gave the students a valuable opportunity to confront actuality in its highest concentration, and following some lamentation on the poor state that philosophy had been dragged into by some would-be philosophers, Hegel concludes by expressing his firm confidence that the time is ripe for a better, more solid philosophy. In the end, Hegel ecstatically offers himself as a custodian of this new spirit:

I salute and invoke this dawn of a worthier spirit, and I address myself to it alone when I declare that philosophy must have a content and when I proceed to expound this content to you. But in doing so, I appeal to the spirit of youth in general, for youth is that fine time of life when one is not yet caught up in the system of the limited ends of necessity and is inherently capable of the freedom of disinterested scientific activity; nor is it yet affected by the negative spirit of vanity, by purely critical drudgery with no content.

(PW, 185; GW18, 17)

The contrast, I believe, could hardly be any sharper! If in October 1818 Hegel stylized himself as a philosopher of the morning dawn, in June 1820 he appeared as a philosopher of the evening dusk. If in 1818 he addressed the new spirit, wanting to promote its advent, in 1820 he seemed to concede that philosophy anyhow always arrived *post factum*. In 1818 Hegel addressed the *youth*, whereas in 1820 he admitted that with philosophy one *could not rejuvenate*: its colour was no longer red (*Morgenröte*), it was grey, even grey in grey, the colour of *old age*.

The parallels between the two passages are so close, and yet they are in such marked contradiction that we are bound, I believe, to read the metaphor of the owl of Minerva against the background of Hegel's initial enthusiasm upon his arrival in Berlin – that is, as a semi-veiled correction of his previous attitude. In saying this I do not suggest that in this period, between October 1818 and June 1820, Hegel decided to accommodate his philosophy to the altered political climate in Prussia (as claimed by Ilting)³ or that in his published writings he somehow wanted to conceal his true opinion (as proposed by d'Hondt). Quite the contrary, the transcriptions of lectures made by Hegel's students in the period 1817–1831 show that despite some differences in emphasis, the key elements of Hegel's political philosophy remained remarkably stable.⁴ Moreover, the lecture notes also show that in the published book Hegel actually *added* two overstretched remarks specifically dedicated to the virulent critique of von Haller and Hugo. If Hegel wanted to accommodate himself to the triumphant reaction in Prussia (Ilting), or give such an impression (d'Hondt), why would he have decided to mount such a fierce attack against the two main intellectual icons of that very reaction?

However, while I believe that in the period in question Hegel did not change his general philosophical stance, in particular not with respect to the state, it is my contention that, as the above confrontation of the two metaphors has shown, he did modify his views on the *relation between philosophy and (political) practice*.⁵ In what follows I will first try to reconstruct the reasons or at least the circumstances that made Hegel revise his conception of the role of philosophy in the world, and I will then try to sketch the consequences that this reversal had for Hegel's mature

metaphilosophical view. It is my contention that, for Hegel, true philosophy, far from being quietist or conformist in any common sense of the word, remained inherently political.

The circumstances

The story reads as a parallel movement of three different threads: the historical development in the German states, the political activities of student associations and Hegel's theoretical and personal confrontations. All three movements coincided in a single incident that triggered a chain of events with devastating consequences for Hegel and his philosophy.⁶

The situation in Germany was defined by Napoleon's defeat, which marked the end of an extremely eventful era. The general apprehension was, however, that it was no longer possible to return to the pre-revolutionary state of things as if nothing had happened. Hegel was particularly convinced of this. Flattering himself that he had predicted such a development already in the *Phenomenology*, he comforted his friend Niethammer – anxious about the prospect that the Bavarian government might now reverse the liberal reforms – claiming that such setbacks had to be regarded as mere transitory events. 'I adhere to the view that the world spirit has given the age marching orders. These orders are being obeyed. The world spirit, this essential [power], proceeds irresistibly' (LE, 325; *Briefe* II, 86). In the guise of practical advice, Hegel added: 'Surely the safest thing to do, both externally and internally, is to keep one's gaze fixed on the advancing giant.' With the call to Heidelberg virtually in his pocket, he noted a week later that promoting the culture of intellect was indeed 'the most important consideration.' 'I want to take the opportunity to apply it and carry it out,' he declared.

The invitation to Berlin, which followed two years later, only reinforced Hegel in this conviction. For Prussia was a particular case. After the humiliating defeat against the French army near Jena in 1806, the Prussian government initiated a far-reaching process of modernization according to the principles of the French Revolution. The medieval privileges were largely abolished, Jews were given some citizenship rights, public careers were in principle open to all, etc. While not yet completed, the reforms were significant enough that following the victory at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, Prussia emerged not only as one of the leading German powers but also as an exemplary modernizing state. It must have been of particular importance for Hegel that Prussian reformers paid special attention to *Bildung*. 'The state must replace by spiritual power what it has lost physically,' Friedrich Wilhelm III reputedly declared. This led to a general overhaul of the educational system and, ultimately, following the project drawn up by Humboldt, to the foundation of the University of Berlin, which was to become the reference model for research universities up to the present time.

When the call came for Hegel to go to Berlin, it must have therefore seemed like a perfect match: Hegel, who attributed to philosophy, and science in general, a decisive role in shaping the world, especially if taught at university,⁷ was summoned to a leading university position in a central German state, which likewise championed scientific knowledge as the paramount force.⁸ It is in this context that the self-confident tone

of Hegel's inaugural address should be read. 'The *power of the spirit* has asserted itself to such an extent in the present age', Hegel remarked, 'that only *Ideas*, and what is in keeping with *Ideas*, can now survive, and nothing can be recognized unless it *justifies* itself before *insight* and *thought*' (PW, 182; GW18, 12). In short, Hegel came to Berlin to offer intellectual support to the reformist wing of the Prussian government, which at the time, and in spite of the gathering clouds, had the wind in their sails.⁹

But then something happened. On 23 March 1819, student Karl Ludwig Sand assassinated the conservative playwright August von Kotzebue. A little later, on 1 July, there was another similar incident as student Karl Lönning attempted to kill the reformist politician Karl von Ibbel. Although the police were well aware that both acts were committed by solitary enthusiasts lacking any real organizational support, they were skilfully used by Metternich, the arch-conservative minister of Austria, as a convenient pretext to curb the reformist movements in the entire Germany. In September 1819, he convinced the representatives of the German states to issue the so-called Carlsbad Decrees, which amongst other things, introduced censorship, dissolved student associations, forbade manifestations of religious hatred and increased police supervision. For various reasons, the Decrees were implemented with particular force in the Prussian territories. In any event, by November 1819, political orientation in Prussia took a sharp turn: reforms were largely stopped, progressive ministers were removed or marginalized and political liberties were restricted. The impossible occurred, the restoration won.

This is the general narrative, which must have been particularly painful for Hegel. He came to Berlin to participate philosophically in the reformist project, confident that nothing could stop the advance of the world spirit. As late as in October 1819, he continued to lecture how philosophy 'gives assurance that what is at the time necessarily happens' (GW26, 338). It turned out that he was wrong, at least provisionally.

The second thread relates to activities undertaken by student fraternities, the so-called Burschenschaften. These associations were in many respects similar to traditional student clubs, with the difference that they were not organized according to the local principle but wanted to include students from all German states. Their members praised the liberal ideals of honour and freedom, equality and German brotherhood, often with Romantic and Christian undertones, thus epitomizing the idea of German unification in line with the principles of modernity (even if they liked to wear fully fictional 'Old-German costumes'). The political implications were clear and deliberate. The fact that many of the Burschen volunteered against Napoleon in what was considered a national liberation war gave additional weight to their aspirations.

The *Urburschenschaft* was founded on 12 July 1815, in Jena under the maxim *Honour, Brotherhood, Fatherland*. The Jena faction was also given the privilege to prepare the all-German Wartburg Festival on 18–19 October 1817, organized in a nationalist-religious blend to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Reformation *and* the fourth anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig. The festival had a strong political charge: the participants proclaimed a declaration demanding the foundation of a unified German state and a constitution. But what struck the public opinion even more vividly was the fact that they also *publicly* burned – as Luther had once burned the papal bull – the symbols of the reviled regime, including *books*: the Napoleonic Code and the Prussian

police manual, Haller's *Restoration of the State Law* and Kotzebue's *History of German Empire*, and also the *Germanomania* by Saul Ascher. That this auto-da-fé was a well-prepared event with elements of ritual was later confirmed by Fries, who confessed the list had been prepared in advance.

Fries is a reliable source. He was a philosophy professor in Jena, he effectively figured as a mentor to the local student association, and the very fact of his speaking at the festival was perceived as a strong political gesture. In the book *On the German Union and the German State Constitution*, he had already addressed the 'German youth' and closed the preface by exclaiming: 'But if you demand new sacrifices, o, Fatherland, then take me as well!' (Fries 1816b: 5). In a pamphlet published in the same year, *On the Endangerment of the Well-Being and Character of the Germans by the Jews*, Fries vigorously defended the proposal put forward by certain Rühls that the Jews were to be excluded from the German community. If they should refuse to abandon their faith, he demanded that they be publicly marked with special symbols and the Jewishness 'extirpated root and branch' (Fries 1816a: 19). In the *Germanomania*, Ascher criticized the theses proposed by Rühls (and hence by Fries) and warned that the cultural hatred against the Jews might easily develop into calls for their physical extermination. His warnings, however, did not convince the zealous students or the 'serious man' Fries,¹⁰ who apparently understood the notion of a free people – 'held together by the sacred bond of friendship' – exclusively in terms of ethnic purity. As Ascher's book was being thrown in the fire, the students chanted: 'Woe upon the Jews, who persist in their Jewishness and want to scoff and scorn our people and our Germanness' (Maßmann 1817: 26).

There was only one voice at the Wartburg festival to speak in defence of the Jews. Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, from Heidelberg University, reminded the audience that in a free state all had to be treated as equals and that 'until there was but one class in the state that scorned and hated others classes, the state was not yet a state' (*Das Burschenfest* 1818: 63). The fact that Carové came from Heidelberg was no coincidence: following Fries, it was Hegel who taught philosophy there from the autumn of 1816. Carové apparently took to the new professor.¹¹ As a prominent figure of the Heidelberg fraternity, he propagated Hegelian views amongst fellow students and even proposed a new motto, with *Right* replacing *Fatherland*. Georg Asverus, who then still supported the old, Friesian faction, reported: 'Friend Carové, or Gar o weh!, has now habituated [the association] to the universal, to the purely rational' (*Briefe* II, 433). In this atmosphere of mounting inner tensions an open conflict finally erupted in relation to the admission of foreigners, particularly Jews. For the supporters of the old breed, the 'main purpose of the association had to be fatherlandish', and they consequently decried 'all the cosmopolites, whether it be Hegel or Carové' as 'fools'; in contrast, the opposite orientation pleaded for an open character of the associations, which in their view had to be 'universal'. In August 1818, a student of theology described the situation as follows: 'Opposed *a diametrico* to the Germans within the student association are the so-called philosophers or Hegelians, who, incidentally, do not at all quibble with their philosophy at the student meeting, but speak quite decently ... The Germans hate no one more than them, foremost among them Carové' (cited in Hubmann 1997: 252).

As we can see, the Heidelberg fraternity had to contend with internal strife regarding key conceptual and organizational questions, a strife that opposed two factions: one nationalistic and ideologically affiliated to Fries, and the other universal and connected to Hegel. It seems very likely that Hegel personally supported Carové in his fight against the Friesians. As a member of the Heidelberg University Senate, for instance, Hegel endorsed the rather unusual proposal that Carové be habilitated with his dissertation on the *Statutes of the Student Association* (which was eventually accepted).¹² What is more, many indications suggest that Hegel was directly engaged in the activities of student associations. In his essay on the Württemberg Estates, published at the end of 1817, he felt it appropriate to make a reference 'to the struggle for Germany's independence' that had 'imbued German youth in the German universities with a higher interest' (see SuE, GW15, 41). This was obviously intended as an act of public support for the political aspirations of student associations, and it was no doubt understood accordingly. Even more telling is that at the end of his lectures on the philosophy of natural right, probably in March 1818, Hegel included a discussion of the Jewish issue. Contrary to some principled arguments in favour of their exclusion from state citizenship, Hegel explained to his students that 'custom and the impulse imparted by the universal rationality to abandon these disharmonies make such exclusion unnecessary' (NRPS, 298; GW26, 211).¹³ Again, such a declaration was in itself a *political act* in support of the so-called universal faction. But if we consider that Hegel introduced the issue of the Jews out of its natural place while this very issue was on the agenda of the fraternity's general assembly that was to be held in Jena several weeks later, the political nature of Hegel's gesture becomes even more pronounced.¹⁴ Let us remember that in his letters Hegel repeatedly expressed his satisfaction with the reception of his philosophy amongst the youth.¹⁵

In any case, after moving to Berlin, Hegel continued to keep close relations with the student associations.¹⁶ Besides de Wette and Schleiermacher, he was one the very few professors to be invited to Pichselberg on 2 May 1819. The number of Hegel's prominent supporters within the fraternity grew as well. In addition to Carové, who followed him to Berlin and acted as his (unremunerated) assistant, there were von Henning, Förster and Asverus, to name but a few who joined the Hegelian wing. What in Heidelberg used to be a local rivalry between two orientations, in Berlin, 'the university of the centre', apparently grew into a broader conflict for leadership in the German student progressive movement.

With this in mind,¹⁷ Hegel's inaugural address appears in a rather different light. Let us remind ourselves: Hegel addressed the *youth* that went through the *experience of war* for national liberation; he saluted them as the *morning dawn* of the new spirit and called on them to work together for the benefit of the common project: me too, I am exclusively engaged with this new, worthier spirit!¹⁸ It is clear, I believe, that by professing these words Hegel wanted to speak directly to the Burschen, proposing himself to become their philosophical tutor. We have also seen that, immediately before, Hegel attacked those self-styled philosophers who propagated a completely vain and superficial standpoint and who, instead of rational knowledge, defended 'faith, feeling, and portent' as the highest possible achievements of the human spirit. By mentioning these philosophical impostors, it was patent to everyone that Hegel

referred to Fries. Hegel and Fries had known each other for quite a while; already in Jena they were caught in a dispute that was both personal and philosophical. Still, it is not hard to see that in his inaugural address Hegel fought another fight as well – the fight for *philosophical leadership in the student associations*. Hegel seemed to be sure of victory, displaying full confidence in this new solid spirit the German youth was imbued with. The situation was indeed heading in the right direction. In a letter to his brother from July 1819, Friedrich Förster remarked that ‘many faithful disciples of Fries later became even more faithful disciples of Hegel; I would like to know whether anyone left Hegel in order to pass over to Fries’ (cited in Hubmann 1997: 254).

But alas, on 23 March 1819, Sand killed Kotzebue. As one might expect, Sand was a Bursche, a member of the Burschenschaften. This fact sealed their fate. The assassination was interpreted as evident proof of their danger to the state order. The associations were disbanded, their spiritual mentors persecuted as demagogues: Fries lost his tenure (but not his pay!) and de Wette was fired. The prosecution came dangerously close to Hegel as well: many of his students were under police surveillance, and at least three of his closest collaborators – Carové, Hegel's would-be assistant, von Henning, Hegel's actual assistant, and Asverus – were actually held in prison. Without wanting to portray Hegel as an activist hero, it is nonetheless manifest that in 1820, not only censorship but also police persecution was not an imaginary category for him. In any event, with the student associations prohibited, it was clear that yet another one of Hegel's Berlin projects – to become the philosophical mentor of the German academic youth – was now out of the question. With philosophy one cannot rejuvenate.

Finally, we must consider the theoretical and personal conflicts between Hegel and his long-time opponent Jakob Friedrich Fries. The story is actually fascinating. Fries started his philosophical career from a similar vantage point as Hegel, in the post-Kantian climate of the crisis of the transcendental project; yet, contrary to Hegel, he attempted to consolidate it by grounding it back in the empirical subject.¹⁹ In the field of theoretical philosophy, Fries developed Kant's critique into a ‘new critique of reason’, conceived as an ‘empirical science’ that deals with the categories human thought is effectively governed by. In the realm of the practical, Fries basically replaced Kant's pure moral feeling with the subject's conviction. Indeed, Fries promoted conviction into a key concept: knowledge, faith and portent (*Ahndung*) were said to constitute three equally legitimate modes of conviction, each relating to its own sphere of objects and working according to its specific laws, with portent at the top.²⁰ Under the combined influence of Kant and Jacobi, Fries thus built a strange system that was equally open to irrational figments and experimental science – in complete accordance with the Zinzendorffian variety of pietism that Fries stemmed from.

Fries and Hegel first met in Jena, where they both became private docents almost simultaneously. It is also there that the story of their professional rivalry started, a story that reads like a parallel biography, in which, however, Fries almost consistently finishes one step ahead of Hegel. After Schelling left for Würzburg in 1803, the position of extraordinary professor was first offered to the younger Fries (as Hegel complained to Goethe), in part also because of his better publishing record. Later on, as they both searched for ways to leave Jena, and there was a vacancy at Heidelberg, it was again Fries who was appointed to the post in 1805. While Fries was enjoying all the privileges of

tenure, Hegel was forced to interrupt his academic career and work first as a journalist in Bamberg and then for eight years at the Nuremberg gymnasium. It was only in 1816, after Fries had moved back to Jena, that Hegel finally returned to the university, accepting the post in Heidelberg – which is to say that he stepped into Fries's shoes (and for a while even lived in his apartment)! However, they now both turned their eyes to Berlin. After some typical academic lobbying on both sides, the invitation was eventually issued to Hegel.²¹ This was in effect Hegel's first academic victory over Fries!

The same relation transpires from their respective publishing activity. In Jena, as already noted, Fries built some initial advantage in this domain. From then on, however, we can witness an almost completely parallel publishing programme, with the tiny difference that, again, Fries was as a rule slightly faster than Hegel.²² One can imagine Hegel seeing Fries as a kind of doppelganger, a younger brother who was inferior to him in all aspects, but who inexplicably became the family favourite. He must have already had Fries on his mind in the *Phenomenology*, while criticizing the philosophy of feeling. In the preface to the *Science of Logic* he fleetingly, with a rightly measured contempt, dismissed Fries's book as an 'insignificant publication' (GW11, 23). But his *true* sentiment comes to the fore only in his personal correspondence. In October 1810, he wrote to Niethammer:

Heidelberg, however, brings me to Fries and his *Logic* ... [My] feeling in connection with it is one of sadness. I do not know whether as a married man I am mellowing, but I feel sadness that in the name of philosophy such a shallow man attains the honorable position he holds in the world, and that he even permits himself to inject such scribbblings with an air of importance.

(LE, 257; Briefe I, 388)²³

Hegel's resentment against Fries was so sharp that he developed a dedicated literary trope with a characteristic vocabulary. Whenever he happened to stumble upon Fries or his standpoint, Hegel ineluctably used the adjective *seicht* (shallow), sometimes also *seicht und eitel* (shallow and vain) to further emphasize the point. Hegel was indignant upon the fact that this *sich so nennende Philosophie* dared to usurp the name of philosophy, and was unable to comprehend how such shallow babbling could have earned any recognition in the learned world. We can find an example of this literary trope in the Berlin inaugural address as well – although now, for a change, accompanied by a triumphant tenor. This time, Hegel had an advantage over Fries: he was speaking at the 'university of the centre', with the opportunity to promote *true* philosophy, *his* philosophy, the philosophy that was not 'shallow', 'superficial' or 'vain'. As we have seen, everything suggested that Hegel was indeed headed for success.

But then a catastrophe followed in which Fries, in a sense, defeated Hegel once more. Karl Ludwig Sand, who assassinated Kotzebue in March 1819, was not only a member of the Burschenschaften – he belonged to the Friesian faction. Moreover, he was a fervent advocate of Fries's philosophy and even acted in accordance with Fries's ethics. As already indicated, Fries retained the *unconditional* nature of Kantian moral duty but assigned the task of its determination to subjective *conviction* and grounded the morality of a deed in its *fidelity* to one's conviction.

The morality of an act ... in our view consists solely in the attitude to follow the law, without any concern for its success. Whatever the conviction of a man regarding what he is obliged to do, it is enough that he obeys it, and we attribute to him the highest that is called good in him, the good will itself.

(Fries 1805: 142–143)

The moral worth of a subject is not defined by *what* she does, it consists solely in whether she has acted according to her conviction. One can be guilty of one thing only, that is, of not having acted according to one's conviction; and inversely, even if one does something unacceptable by any usual standard, the conviction alone can give it full moral approbation. 'A man can commit the most horrible, the most hideous, with the sublime morality of his deeds intact' (Fries 1818: 76). While Fries himself might have been free of such inferences, in his private circle there emerged a doctrine of *direct ethical action*, which in the case of strong conviction *commanded* action.²⁴ Sand belonged to this circle. On the basis of his diary and letters, it is also evident that Sand understood his deed as a direct realization of Fries's ethics of conviction. He lived for his fatherland, he was ready to die for it, and he was convinced that Kotzebue was a traitor who had sold his services to the Russians. Hence, there was only one conclusion: 'The bad one, the traitor and seducer of the youth A. v. K. must go down!' (Carl Ludwig Sand 1821: 174). In his study on Fries, Hubmann convincingly argues that Sand did not act *politically*, for the purpose of some political goal (in this case German unification), but *ethically*: he did what he was convinced had to be done!

The wider public, unaware of the looming government reaction, at first reacted rather compassionately. In the flood of publications that followed, the prevailing apprehension was that while the deed in itself was deplorable, the murderer's intentions were in a sense pure. Even von Hohnhorst, the chief investigator, admitted that Sand was in his own eyes without reproach. He portrayed him as a basically honest young man, prone to melancholy and fanaticism, who fell under the spell of insolent philosophers.²⁵ The same sentiment was conveyed in the letter written by de Wette to Sand's mother: 'He was sure of his cause, in his view it was right to do what he did, and so he did it right' (*Aktensammlung* 1820: 4).²⁶

The first reactions from the Hegelian side are also revealing. Immediately after the assassination, probably already in May 1819, Carové published a booklet about the event. Therein, Carové naturally joined the general condemnation of the deed, but he considered it even more important to put it in the world-historical perspective. His interpretation was that in this very act 'the two extremes of the opposition that drives the present time have ... come to a break, and due to their being unilateral, both have gone to the ground' (Carové 1819: 13–14). The extremes in question are (French) enlightened *understanding*, which reduces everything to 'personal benefit', on the one hand, and the (German) sense for the infinite, which resides in the *feeling*, on the other. Relying on large excerpts from his published works, the booklet portrayed Fries as the main proponent of the extreme of feeling, accusing him of 'thorough indeterminacy' with regard to duty (Carové 1819: 20). At this point, Carové did something truly remarkable: he presented Kotzebue as an incarnation of the extreme of abstract understanding (he betrayed his feeling for profit) and Sand as an incarnation of feeling,

which however, being unilateral, 'intimately touches the other extreme' and 'as a mere play of coincidence' crashes against it. In Carové's view, the assassination should thus be considered as 'truly tragic ... but in the context of the whole necessary crisis in the epoch of transition from one age to another' (Carové 1819: 30–31). After both extremes have perished in this act, says Carové, they both learned to 'recognize the right' of the other side and have 'thereby risen by themselves to reason'!

It is unclear to what extent Carové's booklet engaged Hegel. But since Carové, remarkably, sent an exemplar to minister von Altenstein, Hegel's liaison in the government, it is quite probable that Hegel, too, initially saw Kotzebue's assassination as the finger of the world spirit – that is, as an opportunity to consolidate the reign of his own philosophy over that of Fries. It is no coincidence, remarks Hegel in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, but 'a necessary consequence of the thing itself' that 'this philosophizing ... has come into closer contact with actuality ... and a *public* split has consequently resulted' (PR, 19–20; GPR, GW14.1, 13). The formulations of the two are in any event remarkably close.²⁷

If our assessment stands, then Hegel was forced to acknowledge soon enough that he had not read the pulse of the world spirit correctly. Confronted with actuality, Fries's ethics of conviction did indeed fall; its downfall, however, brought down Hegel's philosophy as well! If Hegel went to Berlin with the intention to impose his philosophy as the central science at the central university, he was now pushed to the margin. His closest friends landed in jail, Carové was permanently barred from having an academic career, and Hegel could no longer count on politically strong supporters. This project had failed as well!

The consequences

For Hegel, the upheaval that followed Sand's deed was not just a regrettable incident; it was a lesson. On the one hand, it taught him that he had underestimated the strength of his philosophical opponents, erroneously relying on the shallowness of Fries's philosophy to expose itself by itself. Because the effective refutation of Fries had not been carried out by philosophy, more precisely, because it had not been performed *by Hegel*, who considered dealing with Fries below his standing,²⁸ this work had to be done by the objective spirit, using its far more robust instruments. Hegel's fierce attack on Fries and his philosophy in the preface has to be read as an overdue public conflict: politically it was false, but philosophically it was no doubt right. On the other hand, the event showed that Fries's philosophy could not withstand the fire probe of actuality; but more importantly, it revealed that Hegel's philosophy failed the test too. Not only was Fries wrong but Hegel was wrong as well. He obviously overestimated the degree of the world spirit's progress. That is why Hegel now, as the thesis goes, made the only consistent move and, on the ground of this lesson, changed his position.

By saying this I do not mean that Hegel introduced any substantial modifications to his theory of the state or the philosophy of right in general. Again, his fundamental position remained remarkably stable throughout the Berlin period, and there is little evidence to suggest that he practised a double mode of writing. If I nonetheless

continue to talk about change, this refers to something very precise: *Hegel's theory of theoretical practice*. We have seen that in his confrontation with the present world Hegel learned of the shortcomings inherent to his standpoint. He did not manage to grasp that which was effectively. What was missing was therefore *not action, but cognition*. As a consequence, Hegel now put everything to the labour of the concept: with philosophy one cannot rejuvenate, one can only know. If theory does not agree with practice, only *more theory* is needed.

The result was Hegel's account of the relation of philosophy with the world presented in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. In spite of his politically dubious attacks on Fries, it is now increasingly acknowledged that Hegel's equation of the actual and the rational is neither conformist nor quietist.²⁹ Kervégan has shown, for instance, that for a proper understanding of the *Doppelsatz* we have to consider the categorical status of the actual, the fact that it belongs to the logic of essence, which includes a 'certain depth' and inner dynamism (Kervégan 2016: 6). The actual is never something merely given, as is the case with *Dasein*, it rather stands for the inherent mediating principle that governs the sequence of temporal events. By equating the rational and the actual Hegel thus not only affirms that, contrary to first impression, the social universe is an object of rational knowledge in very much the same way as this is the case with the natural world; he also assigns to philosophy a constitutive role in the self-sublation of its present state. 'As a thinking of the rationality within actuality, it fixes an insuperable limitation to each form or degree of the real world at the very same time as it identifies the share of rationality that it contains.' Hence, Kervégan concludes, 'political philosophy is a *political epistemology*' (2016: 13).³⁰ Without having to pronounce on current issues or overtly engage in political campaigns, philosophy – at least true philosophy – is political in its very form.

Still, if philosophy is inherently political, one may ask how to comprehend Hegel's claim of the structural too-lateness of philosophy – which 'as the thought of the world', is said to appear 'only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state'. In Hegel's view, this is first and foremost a manifest lesson of history. The great names of philosophy always appeared only after a major breakdown in the objective spirit had already been produced, be it in Greece, Rome or medieval Europe. The important question is why. It is our contention that, for Hegel, this incongruence does not relate so much to some alleged essence of philosophy but to the specific place that philosophical thought occupied in the pre-modern ethical world. The Greek ethical life – to take the example typically used by Hegel himself – was essentially a harmonic world where the subjective and the objective, the particular and the universal, were in immediate unity. Consequently, in the Greek ethical world, the primary mode of the spirit's knowledge of itself was immediate too: it took the form of intuition and found its proper expression in art. It may appear strange, but according to Hegel, the Greek ethical life was fundamentally non-philosophical, since the very form of thought implies 'a separation' that was alien to the simplicity of the Greek spirit. What is more, the separation in question was not considered to be a product of philosophical reflection, but rather a sign that the original harmony had already been lost. Speaking of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle (but also including Descartes, as a medieval author), Hegel declared: 'Philosophy comes forward as a

spirit that separates itself; when it paints its grey in grey the separation into soul and body has already ensued; it is not philosophy that brings the break; it has already taken place' (GW26, 339; see also HV6, 239).

But if in pre-modern times philosophy's relation to the objective spirit was indeed marked by a structural delay, a major shift in the shape of ethical life had happened since. Hegel was convinced that he was living in a time of epochal changes, and he had some non-trivial reasons in support of the claim that the modern world is decisively different from the antique or the medieval one. In his view, the Greek ethical life was bound to fall apart as it was not able to accommodate the principle of subjective freedom. While the Roman world that followed acknowledged this principle, it was plagued by its inability to produce a common ethical substance. Hegel maintained that it was thus only in modern times that the problem of how to integrate the principle of subjective freedom with the universality of the ethical substance was finally solved, first by Luther's Reformation and then by the French Revolution. Hegel was well aware that there remained a lot to be done, that the existing states had oh-so many specific issues still to resolve and that empirically they may even fail. However, he was confident that in the modern epoch the concept of freedom had found its principled realization.

In addition, we have to take into account that, according to Hegel, the historical development of the shape of ethical life goes hand in hand with a parallel progression in the privileged modes of consciousness the spirit has of itself. While the ethical community once attained its self-awareness in art, and later in religion, the highest mode is now reserved for science. In short, if the Greek world was beautiful, and the medieval one was pious, the modern world is rational. The role traditionally performed by art and religion is now performed by science, Hegel seems to affirm, up to the point that instead of priests we now have a 'special *estate*' dedicated to the cultivation of 'science and philosophy in particular' (GW18, 27).

This progression in the form of the absolute spirit further produced analogue modifications in the relation between philosophy and the state. To illustrate the change in question Hegel often referred to the case of Frederick II, who was nicknamed 'the philosopher-king'. True, he earned his epithet on account of the metaphysical treatises he wrote. However, Hegel remarks, 'he was called philosophical king also in the sense that he set himself a completely universal purpose, the welfare, the best of the state, as the principle of his acts and all of his rulings' (HV8, 11). While subsequent princes abided by the same universal principles, they were not called philosophers anymore since by then, according to Hegel, *the time itself had become philosophical*. 'If Plato demanded that philosophers should govern, that institutions be formed according to universal principles, in the modern states this is much more realized; essentially, universal principles are the bases of the modern states ... Consequently, one may say that what Plato demands is in substance established' (HV8, 11–12).

Again, Hegel did not want to deny that many existing states were still far from being rational; indeed, Prussia was in his view in 'the middle state'. The important thing, however, was that the main principle was now different. Whereas once, some '30, 40 years before', public authority used to be based on fear and force, 'in the recent time it is the universal principles' that are acknowledged as the ultimate source of right. 'The culture of the world has taken another turn, the thought has put itself on top of

everything that pretends to be valid', Hegel affirms (GW26, 773). While rationality is a timeless requirement, this epochal shift in the social role of rational knowledge inevitably put philosophy, too, in front of a 'more specific' task: 'Since it is the culture of the time that has elevated to this form, it is a more specific need [of philosophy] to recognize and conceptualize the thought of right' (GW26, 774).

So, we may conclude that Plato was right when he formulated 'the highest pretension of philosophy', insisting that 'the governing and philosophizing should coincide' (GW26, 334). But at the time of its formulation, this call for reflection went against the very form of the existing ethical life. In the pre-modern ethical world, philosophy not only came too late to apply the rejuvenating cure but also actually figured as one of the causes of its corruption. The modern ethical life, on the contrary, includes not only the principle of subjectivity, so that it does not need to suppress inner differences but actually feeds on them, but also it has rational knowledge as the privileged form of its awareness. Consequently, philosophy (and science in general) not only is not in any structural delay in relation to the world but also now designates the very place of its concentrated actuality. For Hegel, philosophy now *is* the self-consciousness of the present spirit.

If, at the end, we return to the grey in grey, we have to make some qualifications regarding the proper reach of Hegel's declaration. In fact, Hegel does not aim at philosophy as such, he explicitly refers to the attitude of those philosophers who would like to '*issue instructions* on how the world ought to be' (PR, 23; GPR, GW14.1, 16).³¹ It is against such abstractly normativistic philosophies (Fries's in particular, we may safely assume), that Hegel *additionally*, in the guise of illustration, alludes to the lesson of history. But what used to be the case before does not necessarily apply anymore, especially if a major shift has taken place in between. This is exactly what happened in Hegel's view: in recent times, there has been an epochal change in the shape of the ethical substance, which in principle resolved the great task of history and elevated philosophy (and science in general) to become the privileged form of knowledge the spirit has of itself. While philosophy was once necessarily out of tune with its world, after the world has itself become philosophical, it is now at least possible that philosophy be in line with it.

In the modern world, philosophy can therefore fully assume the role that transpires from Kervégan's reading of the *Doppelsatz*. As 'its time comprehended in thought', true philosophy is to comprehend what is in the present and thereby contribute to its continuous self-sublation.³² To perform this function, however, philosophy has to meet at least two requirements. First, since the modern world is itself philosophical, it is only by explicitly wanting to be a child of its time that philosophy can perform its task. True philosophy must now, more than ever, want to reside in what is. Second, along with the recent shift in the form of the spirit, philosophy has to undergo an analogous change in its form. In particular, it has to abandon the standpoint of understanding and its mathematical method, and instead embrace speculative thought whose concepts inhabit reality. Unless philosophy finally becomes true philosophy, such as Hegel's, it will remain external to its world, diverging and deferring the march of the world spirit, as was the case with the struggle of the Enlightenment against superstition. Even though true philosophy has no proper place in engaged political activity, it therefore

remains one of its major obligations to lead a theoretical struggle against self-styled philosophers such as Fries (and their post-modern counterparts). For we know that 'in the recent time, theories have caused a lot of damage' (GW26, 773).

Notes

- 1 Quotes from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* are from Nisbet's translation.
- 2 Such a quasi-missionary role of philosophy was formulated by Hegel later, too, for instance in October 1808: 'I am daily ever more convinced that theoretical work accomplishes more in the world than practical work. Once the realm of representation is revolutionized, actuality will not hold out' (LE, 179; *Briefe* I, 253).
- 3 After a thorough reassessment of the editing process, Lucas and Rameil were unable to find any conclusive evidence in support of the thesis that Hegel decided to rewrite an already finished manuscript out of fear of censorship. See Lucas and Rameil (1980).
- 4 For an overview of the argument, see Kervégan's extensive introduction to the French edition of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, in Hegel (2013).
- 5 The revision was painfully resented by some readers close to Hegel. Von Thaden – a Danish public servant who once studied with Fichte, and who on one occasion even exhorted Hegel to 'write a treatise on the state' – composed a letter full of complaints against Hegel's declarations, which even if 'philosophically true', were deemed 'politically false' (LE, 465; *Briefe* II, 282).
- 6 For a general insight into the historical background I refer to biographies of Hegel written by d'Hondt (1998), Pinkard (2002) and now Vieweg (2019). With regard to the Sand case, I rely heavily on Hubmann (1997).
- 7 In October 1815 Hegel remarked to van Thaden, that 'according to our customs such a position [at the university] is almost indispensable if one wishes to introduce a philosophy and propagate it' (LE, 462; *Briefe* II, 139).
- 8 In the invitation letter, Altenstein, the Prussian minister of culture, even suggested that he was contemplating other, much loftier plans for Hegel. 'You know what Berlin can procure for you in this respect. But it should surpass all your expectations if, as I hope, various projects to whose realization I am committed take more definite shape' (LE, 378; *Briefe* II, 170).
- 9 In his introduction to the English translation, Wood shows that the theory of the state presented in the *Philosophy of Right* essentially corresponds to the reformist project of the Hardenberg government, not to the existing state of Prussia.
- 10 The expression comes from Popper (1966: 27).
- 11 In Carové's speech at Wartburg the presence of Hegel was already palpable. Carové extolled 'true freedom' and 'pure rationality' against 'selfishness and vanity, which in everything sees *only itself*' (*Das Burschenfest* 1818: 55, 62), which are typically Hegelian motifs. What is more, Carové quite explicitly assumed a Hegelian standpoint. See, for instance, *Das Burschenfest* (1818: 58, 62).
- 12 In the introduction to his *Entwurf einer Burschenschafts-Ordnung und Versuch einer Begründung derselben*, Eisenach 1818, Carové makes an explicit reference to Hegel, with the book bearing an unmistakably Hegelian character, both in content and in the language used. In support of Carové's habilitation, Hegel wrote: 'In the named work, p. 143, the author refutes the views of professor Fries defended in

- his *Handbook of Practical Philosophy*, Heidelberg 1818. I have to admit that had professor Fries sent these views to the faculty as a treatise in order to obtain a doctoral degree, I would have given a negative vote' (cited in Hubmann 1997: 253)
- 13 The *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* are quoted according to Stewart and Hodgson's translation (1995).
 - 14 See Fischer (2006: 150–151).
 - 15 'Given the meager nourishment and encouragement to which the study of philosophy has long been restricted', Hegel writes in July 1817 from Heidelberg, 'it was a pleasure to note the interest youth immediately shows in a better philosophy once offered' (LE, 593; *Briefe* II, 166). The statement goes against Fries, of course. See also Hegel's letter to Creuzer from October 1819 (LE, 450; *Briefe* II, 218).
 - 16 Even in the 1819–1820 lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel praised the beneficence of the Napoleonic Code: 'And they burnt it!' (GW26, 476).
 - 17 Kervégan, otherwise extremely reliable, accused Ilting of 'overestimating Hegel's influence on the student corporations (it was always very limited)' (Hegel 2013: 24). For justification, Kervégan originally referred to the discussion in Deranty (1998). Both authors seem to have underestimated the organization's internal strife. For instance, if Hegel deplores 'the political agitation of the student association' (LE, 450; *Briefe* II, 218), the accusation is directed against the Friesian factions, which he opposed, *not* against student associations *as such*.
 - 18 The fact that, in many respects, the Berlin inaugural address can be read as a prolongation of the Heidelberg one might suggest that no significant shift occurred in between. This would be wrong. Although Hegel already in Heidelberg spoke of the struggle for national liberation, of the morning dawn, and of his confidence in the youth, the prevailing tenor was markedly different. In Heidelberg, Hegel praised the youth happy because *we had fought*, so that *they may study in calm*. 'We, the older ones, who have matured into men in the storms of the time, may praise you happy, whose youth falls in these days, when you can devote them worrylessly to the truth and science' (GW18, 6). In Berlin, on the contrary, both professors and students were said to belong to *the same generation*, hardened in the war, which *qualified them to study seriously*. 'We must regard it as commendable that our generation has *lived, acted, and worked* in this *feeling*, a *feeling* in which *all that is rightful, moral, and religious* was concentrated' (PW, 182; GW18, 13).
 - 19 The parallel is emphasized in van Dooren (1970). For a short overview of Fries's philosophy, see Pinkard (2002: 199–201).
 - 20 Cf. Fries (1805: 64): 'Knowledge is called only the conviction of a complete cognition, whose objects are cognized through intuition; faith is, on the contrary, a necessary conviction out of mere reason, which can get to our consciousness only in concepts, that is, in ideas; but portent is a necessary conviction out of mere feeling.'
 - 21 How Hegel managed to receive the call to Berlin is a mystery to me. The initial decision was made in April 1816, in part on the basis of Hegel's 'philosophy of nature', which however, had not yet been published at the time! There is also a curious letter to Cousin from August 1818, where Hegel refers to *Jacobi* as having given 'the first impetus for my call to Berlin' (LE, 632; *Briefe* II, 344).
 - 22 To name only the major publications: in 1807 Fries published the *New Critique of Reason*, Hegel the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; in 1811 Fries put out the *System of Logic*, while in 1812 Hegel started his *Science of Logic*; in the field of practical philosophy, Fries published *On the German Union* in 1816 and then in 1818 the *Handbook of Practical Philosophy*, while Hegel issued the *Philosophy of Right* in 1820. In this

- parallel bibliography only Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* seems to lack its counterpart in Fries; then again, the *Encyclopedia* can be considered as a publication that goes with tenure, a duty that Fries had fulfilled back in 1804 with his *System of Philosophy as an Evident Science*.
- 23 At the end of a long tirade, noting in passing that he had 'known that Fries for a long time', Hegel concluded: 'I heard that his lectures were not well attended because by the time one had understood a single word, he had already sputtered out twelve more. I find this quite believable. For his shallowness drives him to pour out twelve new words on top of each word he utters, so that he may drown in himself the feeling of the misery of his thoughts, and likewise drown the students in such verbiage so that they become incapable of holding onto or noting any thought whatsoever' (LE, 257; *Briefe* I, 389).
 - 24 In autumn 1818, the private study group gathering in Fries's apartment included Karl Follen, who at the time already had a respectable activist career behind him. As a member of the Gießen Blacks, Follen advocated violence as a legitimate means of political action; in Jena, he came to justify this programme by grounding it in Fries's ethics of conviction. See, for instance, Follen (1824: 88, 103).
 - 25 See von Hohnhorst (1820: 119).
 - 26 The letter praising Sand's deed as a 'beautiful sign of the time' was intercepted by the police, which led to de Wette's being fired. De Wette published the documents of the entire affair, 'to obtain, in front of the German public, the justice that was refused to him by His Majesty'. The book was a bestseller, with the 2,500 exemplars being sold out in two months' time.
 - 27 There are some clues that it was actually Carové who persuaded Hegel to adopt a more committed attitude. Weckwerth remarks, for instance, that Carové understood Hegel's philosophy as a 'theory of liberal practice' (1992: 24). In any event, Hegel's engaged phase corresponds to his collaboration with Carové.
 - 28 Fries's 'shallowness', Hegel remarked in 1812, 'dispenses me from the trouble of taking any notice of this insignificant publication' (GW11, 23).
 - 29 With one exception that is hard to explain. Hegel writes in the preface that the '*truth concerning right, ethics, and the state is at any rate as old, as it is openly exposed and promulgated in public laws and in public morality and religion*' (PR, 11; GPR, GW14.1, 7). This is obviously not the case.
 - 30 See also GW18, 66.
 - 31 In this, but also in many other points, I come close to the position developed by Renault; see Renault (2004: 23).
 - 32 At this point, the vast issue of the end of history emerges, which I cannot explore here.

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Hegel's Political Philosophy as Metaphilosophy

Andrew Buchwalter

One way of characterizing Hegel's conception of philosophy is to say that it is its own metaphilosophy. Consistent with its commitment to the principle of the autonomy of reason, a central requirement of philosophy, for Hegel, is that it account for its own nature, status and foundation. This understanding finds its most developed articulation in the account of philosophy with which Hegel concludes his doctrine of absolute spirit, itself the final part of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. There he elaborates a conception of philosophy dedicated to a notion of self-knowing reason modelled on the concept of divine intellect – 'the thought of thought' – detailed by Aristotle in Book Lambda of his *Metaphysics* (EPM,¹ §577; LHP1² III, 546). At issue is a robustly comprehensive notion of self-grounding reason, one in which the process of reflexive self-justification proceeds isomorphically with its own self-production.

Yet if Hegel's conception of metaphilosophical analysis is quintessentially articulated with the account of philosophy detailed in the doctrine of absolute spirit, it is not restricted to that account alone. Committed to the principle of the unity of reason, Hegel deploys the resources of his metaphilosophical ideal throughout the entirety of his philosophical system, in the *Logic* as well as the various domains of the *Realphilosophie*. He makes the point explicitly with regard to his political philosophy and what his system terms the doctrine of objective spirit. As he famously writes in the 'Preface' to the *Philosophy of Right*, 'it will be readily noticed that the work as a whole, like the construction of its parts, is based on the logical spirit,' and 'it is chiefly from this point of view that I would wish this treatise to be understood and judged' (PR,³ 10). If, as Hegel claims, the *Logic* finds prototypical expression in the 'self-thinking Idea' (EL,⁴ §286, amended) and the activity of the 'pure concept conceptually comprehending itself' (SL,⁵ 753), then a political philosophy based on the logical spirit must instantiate that same process and activity.

But to say that the theory of objective spirit instantiates the principles that infuse the metaphilosophical conception that Hegel elaborates in the doctrine of absolute spirit is not to say that it does so in exactly the same way. This is precluded not least by the very subject matter of objective spirit. Focused on the concept of freedom realized in the spatio-temporally delimited world of historically existing traditions, practices and institutions, objective spirit is responsive to a 'finitude' distinct from the modes of 'infinite' self-reflection, self-grounding and self-production associated with

the highest forms of Hegel's metaphilosophical aspirations. It is telling that, even as he claims that the political philosophy expresses the principle of self-comprehending reason central to his approach to philosophy generally, he asserts as well that philosophical comprehension here takes the form of a *post festum* retrospectivity distinct from the immanent self-reflection specific to the full account of the metaphilosophical ideal. To the extent that the theory of objective spirit does express the latter, it does so in a way attentive to the specificity of that domain, engaging a notion of rationality responsive equally to the requirements of 'self-conscious spirit' and 'present actuality' (PR, 22–23). In an influential characterization, K.H. Ilting articulated a version of this dyadic view, asserting that the *Philosophy of Right* represents both 'a foundation of practical philosophy' and 'a phenomenology of the consciousness of freedom' (Ilting 1982).

In what follows I examine core elements of Hegel's metaphilosophy of the political. My aim is twofold: (1) to delineate the form and nature of Hegel's metaphilosophical ideal as articulated in his account of the political, and (2) to explicate the way in which that account is itself shaped by its instantiation of central components of the metaphilosophical conception. In both respects I seek to fill a lacuna in the scholarly literature on Hegel's theory of objective spirit. While much in recent years has been written on the 'method' of Hegel's political philosophy, little exists on the metaphilosophical dimension itself, a shortcoming that the following effort seeks to rectify. In pursuing this goal, I refrain from undertaking a dedicated presentation of the metaphilosophical conception itself, the focus of other contributions to this volume. My aim instead is to draw on elements of that conception to illuminate Hegel's conception of the political.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part considers the manner in which the account of philosophical self-reflexivity central to Hegel's metaphilosophical conception informs the idea of realized freedom elaborated by the doctrine of objective spirit. The second part considers the way in which the form of *activity* central to metaphilosophical cognition is uniquely instantiated in the doctrine of objective spirit and, particularly, its theory of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). The third part considers how the conception of metaphilosophical self-reflexivity as extended to the domain of the political entails an account of historicity characterized by a futurity and openness to renewal on the part of sociopolitical lifeforms. The fourth and final part considers the place of metaphilosophical reflexivity in Hegel's account of retrospective comprehension, focusing on his conception of the relationship of a historical form of life and the successor said to know it more completely.

Metaphilosophical reflexivity, objective spirit and realized freedom

We begin by considering the idea of objective spirit as an account of sociality manifest in spatio-temporally delimited forms of life. As noted, this account would seem to militate against a metaphilosophical approach animated by principles of 'infinite' and comprehensively sovereign self-reflection. Objective spirit depicts modes of *Geist* as embodied in historically subsisting lifeforms, those objectified in an already 'existing

(*vorhandenen*) world' (PR, §142). As such, its focus is distinct from that of absolute spirit, where spirit fully has itself as its own object. Indeed, Hegel scholarship is replete with analyses that construe his political philosophy precisely in its distinction from the robust self-reflexivity appropriate to the philosophical thinking specific to absolute spirit. For instance, some comprehend Hegel's account of objective spirit's ethical life as privileging the unreflective modes of habitual knowing specific to the embedded nature of our everyday sociality (Novakovic 2017). Others, drawing on the resources of structural linguistics, see in objective spirit a set of rules and established practices that obtain independently of processes of self-reflective comprehension (Descombes 1994).

Yet, to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the theory of objective spirit is not to say that modes of self-reflection and self-grounding are any less operative there than they are in the doctrine of absolute spirit. Instead, they simply assume a form appropriate to the object domain in question. Indeed, far from representing a diminution in the power and fecundity of an account of self-conscious spirit, the theory of objective spirit, precisely as a philosophical 'comprehension of the present and the actual' (PR, 20), further attests to the extent and distinctiveness of Hegel's metaphilosophical commitments. The point is basic to the way in which the doctrine of objective spirit articulates the idea of realized freedom.

Central to the idea of freedom as articulated by objective spirit is its embodied realization in a set of existing practices and institutions. Yet, to speak of the embodied reality of freedom is not simply to note that existing social structures do in fact instantiate the idea of freedom. Hegel's stronger claim is that freedom is properly realized only as the individuals comprising an existing lifeform also know and understand themselves as free; indeed, that lifeform counts as free only in its members 'knowing that they are' such (LHP1 I, 22). To affirm a notion of freedom that does not integrate the consciousness of that freedom on the part of those deemed to be free is to characterize freedom in terms of the modes of external determination foreign to its very conception. Realized freedom, for Hegel, is not a state of affairs evident simply to third-person theorizing; if it is not to be constrained by external considerations, it must be known as well from the first-person perspective of affected individuals. Central to objective spirit is a notion of realized freedom indeed understood in terms of the principle of internal or immanent reflexivity articulated with the metaphilosophy.

Hegel's position accords with his general account of spirit. Spirit is the principle that systematically infuses the theory of objective spirit, as it does subjective and absolute spirit. It is defined generally as the conjunction and interpenetration substance and subjectivity (PS, 10),⁶ and it denotes a reality that is and becomes subject to and for itself. In the historically realized domain of objective spirit, the idea of spirit instantiates a specifically political articulation of the general conjunction of substance and subjectivity. Here freedom, whose realization is the animating principle of objective spirit, achieves full reality only as the members of a community, whose practices and institutions can be said to express principles of freedom, also exhibit a consciousness of that freedom. Realized spirit is the *self-knowing* actuality of spirit (PR, §270 R). Consonant with the principle of internal reflexivity basic to the metaphilosophical ideal, objective spirit articulates the 'most important point for the nature of spirit ... the relation of what it *knows itself* to be what it actually is' (SL, 37).

Hegel's position is further detailed in his theory of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), the core component of the doctrine of objective spirit and his political philosophy generally. Ethical life connotes an account of sociality rooted in existing institutions and everyday practices. As such, it gives voice to a notion of practical philosophy understood indeed as *objective* spirit and thus at variance with the principles of subjective right and morality that focus the preceding sections of the *Philosophy of Right*. Yet, this is not to say, as is often said, that with the notion of *Sittlichkeit* Hegel jettisons attention to principles of subjective right and morality. For one thing, both are integrated into what, for him, is a *modern* account of ethicality, one centrally rooted in principles of subjective freedom. For another, the very reality of ethicality – 'knowing and thinking ethical life' (PR, §255 A) – only exists in its reflective acceptance and endorsement by members of a community. 'It is the self-awareness (*Selbstgefühl*) of individuals that constitutes the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)' of a polity and a genuine ethical community (PR, §265 A). As with objective spirit generally, ethicality denotes a political community reflexively constituted in its members consciousness of their commonality. Ethicality is its own 'indwelling self-consciousness' (EPM, §552).

Consideration of the doctrine of objective spirit as a theory of realized freedom demonstrates core elements of Hegel's metaphilosophical programme: that the presentation of a phenomenon goes hand in hand with the normative reflection on that phenomenon, that such reflection assumes the form of the phenomenon's internal self-reflection and that the reality of that phenomenon is fully constituted only in its internal self-reflection. But the account of objective spirit attests as well to the justificatory expectations of Hegel's metaphilosophical programme. Philosophical justification, for Hegel, is also articulated in the idea of the autonomy of reason – the idea that a particular state of affairs must account for its own foundations. In Hegel's language, something is so certified when validated not only in itself but for itself as well, not only from the external perspective of the theoretical analyst but also from the internal perspective of the subject matter itself. In the case of the *Philosophy of Right*, the particular subject matter – the idea of right – acquires definitive 'validity in and for itself' (PR, §333) with the concluding consideration, that devoted to world history, the 'supreme' right in a philosophical science of right (PR, §33 A). Defined as the progress in the consciousness of freedom, world history represents the ultimate validation of the concept of realized freedom. To the extent achieved, it denotes the domain in which the principles of right are defined, concretized and certified not just for the third-person perspective of the philosophical observer but in and through the experience of the persons and peoples to and for whom they have meaning and application. As the progress in the consciousness of freedom, world history, and thus the *worldly* realization of freedom, acquires validated reality only as members of a global community acquire first-person consciousness of themselves as that realization.

The point can be made more concretely social by allowing that this validation process assumes a 'second-person' dimension as well. As participants in the historical progress in the consciousness of freedom, persons and peoples establish ever richer relations embodying the principle of selfhood in otherness, the core of Hegel's conception of freedom. Selfhood in otherness is actualized, however, not simply as humanity generally achieves increased and increasing recognition of itself in the objective conditions of

its existence. It also denotes the process by which diverse persons and peoples forge *amongst themselves* expanded and more successful relations of reciprocal recognition, the quintessential form of selfhood in otherness. Achievement of more successful such *intersubjective* relationships also requires a commitment on the part of persons and peoples to the conditions of reciprocity itself and, in particular, that they '*recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another*' (PS, 12). Here too Hegel's account of objective spirit is shaped by an internal reflexivity. A self-grounding philosophical justification of right *qua* idea of realized freedom also depends on the activity of the diverse members of existent communities interactively attending to the conditions of their shared sociality.

Appreciation of its self-reflexive dimension is, to be sure, not to gainsay the non-cognitive components of a theory of objective spirit. To do so would be to ignore important features of Hegel's account of ethical life, the effectiveness of whose norms, practices and institutions lies precisely in the degree to which they can be performed as a matter of habit, even '*mechanically*' (EPM, §410 A) and '*unconsciously*' (PR, §144). In this respect, institutional norms and practices denote aspects of the '*second nature*' also central to a concept of ethical life understood as objectively embodied spirit.

Still, what characterizes the second nature of ethical life, certainly under modern conditions, is a reflexive character of its own. Ethical life denotes second nature in that it represents the habitual rendering of conceptual norms basic to the idea of political modernity – not just that individuals are recognized as bearers of rights but that they recognize themselves as such, something in turn manifest in a disposition to regulate one's '*will according to a universal principle*' (PR, §209 A). For Hegel, institutional norms and practices do possess a pre-existing authority that precedes the active will and cognition of individuals, both singly and in concert. Yet, this is to say, not that they are not also principles of will and cognition, but only that, in an account of embodied normativity, customs and habits are themselves constituted by such principles. Consonant with Hegel's account of a '*spiritualized second nature*', the customary elements of an ethical substance '*contain the moment of being thought and being known*' (PR, §211 R). If ethical life possesses the form of an ethical *substance*, it is emphatically a '*self-conscious ethical substance*' (EPM, §535), one in keeping with the claim that '*the substance of spirit is freedom*' (EPM, §382 A, translation modified). Even in the embodied form of a second nature, ethical life denotes a substance that both epistemically and ontologically is informed by modes of subjective reflection.

In this regard, second nature, for Hegel, also articulates the idea of self-conscious spirit. This is central to the philosophical account of right itself, for which second nature programmatically denotes the form of embodied existence required of a concept of freedom whose actuality depends on its acquiring expression in conditions external to itself. Objective spirit depicts a system of realized freedom understood as '*the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature*' (PR, §4). But the point is also central to Hegel's general account of rationality, for which thought has itself as its own object. Here, second nature, unlike the given reality of a first nature, is an element in an account of a '*self-objectifying*' reason (EL, §236) established and maintained in its '*distinguishing of itself from itself*' (EL, §237) and whose autonomy consists precisely in affirming itself in that other to itself (EPM, §385 A).

In multiple ways the doctrine of objective spirit *qua* theory of realized freedom exemplifies core elements of the self-reflexivity central to Hegel's metaphilosophical ideal. The nature of realized freedom gives voice to the view that the philosophical elaboration of a state of affairs goes hand in hand with the latter's reflection on itself. Further, in keeping with a metaphilosophy committed to the autonomy of reason and reason's capacity to account for itself, freedom realized is validated only to the degree that the subject matter, from both the first- and second-person perspectives of social actors, knows and affirms itself as free. In addition, the 'finitude' and spatio-temporally delimited reality of objective spirit furnishes the arena for the articulation of a notion of reason whose self-objectifying and 'infinitely' self-grounding nature mandates its expression in what is alien to itself.

Realized freedom, self-determining thought and the activity of cognition

Hegel's metaphilosophy involves a systematic process of thought's self-comprehension. Yet, such comprehension should not be conceived in a narrowly cognitive or epistemic manner. Instead, Hegel understands that process as practical activity as well, one where self-reflexivity is also a species of action. Central here is the idea of thinking or cognition as itself an activity, indeed an emphatic form of self-determination. This is so in the sense that, properly conceived, thinking produces its own content and thereby also itself. It is also so in the sense that self-reflexive activity is its very content – that thinking enacts or actuates its nature in the activity of self-reflection itself. Indeed, on Hegel's view these two features of conceptual activity are in the end one and the same. What he said of the self-knowing mind pertains to self-knowing reason as well: 'the product is one and the same as that which produces itself' (EPM, §379 A). Consistent with the Aristotelian conception of *nous* invoked by Hegel, reason here is emphatically 'self-actuating' (EL, §20). It is as regards this robust form of 'self-determining thinking' (EL, §20) that the claim that reason provides for its own foundations acquires especially pronounced articulation.

Hegel's point, however, is not that the self-determining activity he associates with thought should itself be construed in a narrowly theoretical manner. Instead, it is a feature of his account of the political as well. The notion of the self-grounding, self-productive, self-causative agency central to the metaphilosophical ideal is no less operative as regards the forms of practical agency specific to the doctrine of objective spirit. This is not to say that Hegel does not also espouse a historically embodied notion of agency, one rooted in existing circumstance, forged through ongoing modes of social interaction and shaped by the institutional norms of a particular form of life. Yet, support for an embodied or 'expressive' view of agency does not gainsay support for a self-productive and self-causative one as well (cf. Pippin 2008; Buchwalter 2012: ch. 6). Indeed, the distinctive feature of Hegel's approach is that the two approaches, far from contraposed, are mutually implicative and reciprocally enriching. This becomes clear when his conception of agency is viewed in terms of the doctrine that comprises the *locus classicus* of his embodied account of practical reason: the theory of ethical life itself.

As detailed above, objective spirit connotes the idea of realized freedom. As such, it is variously tied to modes of practical agency. For one thing, freedom is realized in forms of practical agency that are themselves expressive of freedom. Defined as selfhood in otherness, freedom pertains not only to individuals but also to communities, whose self-identity is affirmed and reaffirmed as members affirm and reaffirm themselves in the historically existing conditions of their existence. In addition, however, practical agency is central to the morphology of realized freedom itself. As noted, freedom is realized not simply when practices and institutions instantiate its principles but when affected individual also know that they are free. Dispositive here, however, is not simply that individuals do in fact know themselves as free. Central is also the *activity* of knowledge, that associated with a community knowing and understanding itself as free. Consistent with its character as objective *spirit*, realized freedom instantiates the conjunction of substance and subjectivity. But to conceive realized freedom in this way is to conceive it, not as a thing, but as a process, namely as a reality that subsists in its acquiring consciousness of itself. What characterizes such self-consciousness, however, is not the consciousness of an already existing reality. In line with the idea of spirit as a substance that becomes subject to itself, it is the source of reality itself, and doubly so. Not only does that process engender the reality of realized freedom; it is that very reality. Applied to reality of a polity, freedom is realized in a community in which its members, reflexively attending to the conditions of their shared community, fashion the very reality of that freedom, the substance of which is *a limine* the creative activity itself.

These considerations illustrate how the doctrine of objective spirit bears on Hegel's notion of metaphilosophical self-reflection as a form of political agency. Here the self-determining thought expressive generally of the activity of cognition is replicated in the account of realized freedom as articulated in the doctrine of objective spirit. In this case freedom is realized in a community's knowledge of its own freedom, something actualized in the reflexive agency of a community accounting for its own commonality. It is in such practices of public self-definition that a community not only clarifies itself but also communally constitutes itself. In this way Hegel's account of politics manifestly instantiates the robust form of self-determining activity proper to his metaphilosophical programme.

The point can be further detailed by considering the centrality of this idea of agency for the theory of ethical life, the core component of the doctrine of objective spirit. As noted, ethical life is 'knowing and thinking ethical life' (PR, §255 A). At issue is a community that subsists in the consciousness of its commonality. Part of this ethical (*sittliche*) self-consciousness is an appreciation on the part of community members that their well-being is intertwined with that of their fellow members and the community as a whole. Such appreciation in turn occasions an active willingness to promote the conditions of their sociality, a state of affairs that itself further contributes to realized ethicality. A complete account of ethical life thus presupposes that individuals 'knowingly and willingly recognize this universal interest as their own substantial spirit, and actively pursue it as their ultimate end' (PR, §260). For Hegel, ethical life attains 'its actuality though self-conscious action' (PR, §142).

Nor should ethical life be understood simply as the instrumentally achieved product of practical agency. Instead, ethicality is intrinsic to ethical action itself. The

effort by which individuals forge the shared relations of mutuality and commonality connoted by ethicality performatively affirms that very ethicality. Here ethical action exemplifies the activity (*Tätigkeit*) of spirit itself, where 'the product is the same as that which produces itself' (EPM, §382 A). When Hegel identifies ethicality with 'self-conscious action', his point is not simply to reference a form of action expressed in the explicit and deliberate commitment to community and the ends of public life. Action is self-conscious as well in that the very commitment enacts and re-enacts ethicality itself. Ethical action is indeed 'self-determining action' (PR, §258).

Hegel's position reflects a decidedly modern approach to a notion of ethicality. He construes ethical life as the articulation of a notion of objective spirit understood in part as a shared political culture of freedom. Yet, what characterizes that culture is not first and foremost a shared consensus on a set of substantive norms and values. As with other modern political theorists, Hegel deems demands for such consensus as anathema to modern pluralism and to what he calls the right of subjective freedom. In nonetheless espousing an account of ethical commonality, he appeals rather to the shared activity of members of a community attending to the conditions of their commonality. He thereby propounds a reflexive rather than substantive conception of ethical life. It is an ethical life constituted above all not in a specific set of shared values, but in a shared commitment to the conditions for communal life itself. If Hegel can still be said to espouse a substantive account of ethical life, it is one consistent with the process-based nature of spirit, in which that substance is the productive engendering of its own substantiality.

Central to such productivity is the public deliberation that transpires in the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*), the final component in Hegel's account of a domestic polity. For Hegel, the public sphere, which comprises a range of formal and informal sub-spheres, is the domain – unlike that of mere public opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*) – where members of a community attend to matters of shared and 'universal' concern (PR, §309). It is the domain in which a community fashions and refashions a 'self-consciousness of its freedom and its right' (NRPS, §154).⁷ Proper to such self-consciousness, however, is not simply reflection on matters of common concern. Basic as well is the activity of community members performatively enacting and re-enacting commonality itself. As with ethical action generally, the ethical deliberation specific to the public sphere exhibits an intrinsic as well as extrinsic relation to the shared ends of ethical life, one in which public deliberation itself actualizes the modes of commonality that form the subject matter of deliberation. Here, too, public agency replicates that activity of spirit wherein 'the product is the same as that which produces itself' (EPM, §382 A). In his early writings, Hegel characterized the 'divinity' of a community – its self-causative power – in terms of its status as a 'deliberating and reflective people' (SEL, 176, 144). This notion is reaffirmed in his later characterization of religious community in terms of the activity by which a people 'defines what it takes to be true' (LPWH, 105). Here, too, a community constitutes itself as it deliberates on and clarifies the conditions of its shared identity.

The concept of agency that informs Hegel's conception of ethical life uniquely reaffirms core elements of his conception of metaphilosophy. Ethical action not only involves the self-reflexivity central to that philosophy but also entails a creativity in

which – consistent with the idea of the autonomy of reason – it generates its reality in the self-reflexive activity itself. In this regard, ethicality entails a reflexivity that, as with the metaphilosophy generally, assumes the form of a self-determining agency. Such self-determining agency, to be sure, takes a distinctive form in the account of objective spirit. At issue is a particularly rich form of modern republicanism, one in which civic engagement is understood not only as a tool for safeguarding individual liberty but also as a framework facilitating the constitution and co-constitution of individual and collective identity alike (see Buchwalter 2012: ch. 8). It is, however, against the backdrop of Hegel's conception of metaphilosophy that the parameters of this understanding of the political are especially evident.

Historicity and metaphilosophical reflexivity

In his account of self-actuating reason, Hegel, to be sure, is not referencing an autarkic process whereby thought produces its content *ex nihilo*. Though often attributed to him, this view does injustice to self-determining reason itself. While reason does produce its own content, it does not do so in a narrowly self-generative manner. At issue instead is a reconstructive process that proceeds through reflection (*Nachdenken*) on exogenously received data (EL, §2). In line with the *modus operandi* of the *Realphilosophie* generally, a proper account of reality consists in processing what is provided through existing claims and assumptions and restating it in ways that meet the requirements of reason. It is just this reconstruction (*Nachbildung*) (EL, §12) of mere existence (*Dasein*) in conceptual forms (*Begriffe*) that reality (*Wirklichkeit*) acquires the status of true and philosophically authenticated being (*wahrhafte Sein*). Philosophy provides for its own foundation through processes of conceptual 'exertion' characterized as the 'labour of the concept' (PS, 35, 43, amended). Yet, such processes consist not in modes of autarchic self-instantiation, but in those whereby given claims are reworked to express the rationality constitutive of their genuine reality (see Buchwalter 2012: 9–12).

Hegel's point, however, is not that reconstruction is an operation performed on a given material by an externally situated theorist. Instantiating a philosophy understood as a self-grounding phenomenon, reconstruction denotes a process whereby a subject matter 'reconstructs itself' (VGP III, 56). Philosophical reconstruction thus replicates the nature of *Geist* itself, understood as the phenomenon whereby a substance acquires proper reality in becoming subject to itself. As a process of conceptual labour, reconstruction is one in which the object of labour is also its subject, and one in which it thereby participates in the 'labour of its own transformation'. Understood thus as a process of 'self-transformation' (EPM, §379 A), conceptual reconstruction is isomorphic with a notion of dialectics conceived as the immanent development of the *Sache selbst* (PR, §2, 31 R). But it is also central to Hegel's view of self-determining thinking, where self-creation is a process of self-development in which the object produced is identical to its manner of production.

Nor should it be assumed that self-reconstruction so conceived culminates in a definitive account of reality. This is precluded, first, by the fact that reconstruction proceeds through the assessment of existing and empirically generated claims and

assumptions. The variable nature of these claims and assumptions together with the prospect, in the face of changing historical circumstances, that new ones will inevitably emerge, dictate that reconstructive efforts will be ongoing and recurring. Second, any definitive account is also debarred by the self-reflective process itself. Self-reconstruction is a process in which the subject of reflection makes itself an object of reflection. For that very reason, however, self-reconstruction is necessarily incomplete, as the activity of reflection always remains presumed in any effort to objectify that activity. In an account of self-reflection that purports to be comprehensive, each act of self-reflection occasions yet another, and so on ad infinitum. As Hegel says of the self-comprehending activity of spirit: 'the completion of an act of comprehension is at the same time its alienation and transition ... [T]he spirit which comprehends this comprehension anew and which ... returns to itself from its alienation, is the spirit at a stage higher than that at which it stood in its earlier comprehension' (PR, §343). Self-reflection is thus an ongoing and open-ended phenomenon, a continual process of self-transformation where thought is ever the 'distinguishing of itself from itself' (EPM, §378 A). The process of thought providing for its own foundations is a cognitive activity expressive of its 'pure' form, namely 'absolutely restless being' (EPM, §378 A).

These considerations bear further on the way in which Hegel's metaphilosophical programme is instantiated in his political philosophy. Articulated in the finite domain of objective spirit, the 'absolutely restless being' central to the project of infinite self-comprehension is manifest in an appreciation of historical contingency and an openness to future lifeforms on the part of members of an existing political community. Such sensitivity is exemplified in Hegel's intersubjective conception of self-identity and the notion that the identity of persons and peoples is best understood, temporally as well as spatially, through reference to individual and collective selves other than themselves (see Buchwalter 2018: 48–49). But a consciousness of futurity also inheres in the very identity of a political community.

The distinctive historicity of a political community – or *Volksgeist* – can, on Hegel's view, be appreciated by considering its constitutive principle: collective self-identity. Hegel understands the identity of a political community in terms of the principle of freedom defined through the notion of selfhood in otherness. A community acquires and maintains an autonomous identity as it perceives itself in the historically determined conditions of its existence. Those conditions, however, are ever changing, with the result that a polity's identity is itself always subject to change. The historicity of experience is such that a political community, in affirming a sense of self, must regularly restate, redefine and re-establish its identity as it repeatedly comes to terms with the changing conditions of its existence. What Hegel says of a constitution obtains as well for the sense of shared identity thus constituted: it must be regularly 'rejuvenated' (NRPS, §134).

Proper to such rejuvenation, however, is not simply a phenomenon *undergone* by a community. Central to the self-identity of that community is also a consciousness of rejuvenation, something that follows from the concept of spirit infusing any particular instantiation of objective spirit. As an embodiment of spirit and thus the principle of indwelling reflexivity, a community is defined not just on the model of a substance

rendered as subject; it is also the consciousness of that very process. Stated in terms of the principle of freedom also connoted by spirit (EPM, §382), the autonomy of community is established not only in itself but for itself as well. Yet, for Hegel, the process whereby what is in itself becomes for itself *also* becomes for itself: 'this being-in-and-for-itself ... must also be this *for itself*' (PS, 14). A political community thus establishes its freedom not only as it establishes and re-establishes itself in the conditions of its existence but also in the awareness that its identity subsists in the consciousness of itself as this ongoing process. To acknowledge that collective identity is constituted in its self-consciousness as a phenomenon of renewal is to acknowledge as well that a historicity attaches to that identity. In her reading of Hegel, Catherine Malabou asserts that a temporality 'forms the *anticipatory structure* operating within subjectivity itself' (Malabou 2005: 13). In like manner we might say that an awareness of futurity inheres in the self-identity of reflexively constituted forms of social life.

Hegel elaborates the point in his account of world history – specifically, in the relationship of the 'restricted' principle of individual peoples or *Volksgeistern* and the 'unrestricted' principle of the *Weltgeist* (PR, §340). Consistent with the foregoing, he asserts that the 'objective actuality' of a people is constituted in its 'self-consciousness'. This is the 'inner particularity' (my emphasis) that defines what it is. Central to that inner *particularity*, however, is the specific way in which it affirms its identity vis-à-vis 'external contingency', that expressed in the existing geographical, social and historical circumstances in terms of which it shapes and reshapes its particular self-understanding. It is in forging an identity in response to these circumstances that a particular community integrates into its sense of self-awareness an appreciation of its own contingent 'finitude', one that in turn fosters a sensitivity to the reality and experience of other historically situated communities (PR, §340). Here, too, a historicity informs the self-identity of existing lifeforms.

The phenomena of historicity, futurity and open-endedness here depicted are particular to the domain of objective spirit, the sphere of freedom realized in historically existent social circumstances. Yet, these phenomena perform their function because they also articulate wider metaphilosophical concerns. The historicity of lifeforms derives from indwelling structures of self-identity informed by 'restless' processes of self-differentiation, self-transcendence and self-renewal. Here, too, the domain of objective spirit enacts the principles of self-reflexivity informing Hegel's metaphilosophical ideal.

Retrospective knowledge and self-reflexive prospectivity

In opposition to what has been argued in the preceding section, it may be claimed that the historicity of knowledge and experience, far from affirming Hegel's metaphilosophical commitments, serves only to contravene them. In the 'Preface' to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel famously characterizes philosophical comprehension as a retrospective phenomenon, one that transpires only *post festum*. Perched on the wings of the owl of Minerva, philosophy takes flight only at dusk, after the real has 'attained it completed stage' (PR, 21). As such, comprehension appears to take the

form of an *external* reflection on a given state of affairs, and thus as one at odds with the internal reflexivity and immanent self-reflection proper to the metaphilosophical conception.

Hegel seems to make just this point with regard to the self-understanding of a political community. As just noted, the historicity of a community's self-identity lies in an incipient future reference, including a reference to future lifeforms. Yet, for Hegel, proper knowledge of a particular community is available only to a future form of life, not to the existing lifeform itself. At issue is the incompleteness in an existent community's manner of self-knowledge. On the model of a substance that becomes for itself subject that is dispositive as much for individual *Volksgeistern* as it is for the idea of *Geist*, identity is understood as a form of indwelling self-consciousness. On pain of infinite regress, however, one community can never fully make itself an object of reflection. Every effort by a knowing subject to render itself an object presupposes another act of reflection, and so on ad infinitum. To the extent that one culture does obtain a more comprehensive account of itself, as subject as well as object, it is only in the knowledge provided by a subsequent form of life, whose distanced vantage point enables it more successfully to render a previous lifeform a holistic object of reflection. It is 'a later form of Geist ... that ... knows what a previous one is' (VR 1822–1823, §260). Consistent with the approach to philosophical comprehension Hegel proffers in the *Philosophy of Right*, a proper understanding of a particular lifeform is achieved only retrospectively. One form of life is known and realized only in its transcendence (Brauer 1982: 186–190).

Yet, to say that one form of life is fully comprehended only in a subsequent lifeform is not to say that it does not also contribute to that comprehension. While a particular lifeform cannot comprehend itself as can an ensuing counterpart, reference to the latter and its mode of historical reflection is still anticipated and even initiated by the former.⁸ An existing form of life is indeed 'the inward birth-place of the spirit that will later arrive at actual form' (LHP1 I, 55). In this respect, the retrospectivity that is the office of a new form of life is, for Hegel, itself prospectively generated. The point follows again from the antinomic structure of the self-conscious identity that first triggered the need for a lifeform's transcendence.⁹

As noted, no community can fully grasp itself. Every attempt to do so generates an opposition between the act of knowledge and the object known. The very act of self-comprehension thus bespeaks its own failure. Central to the act of self-comprehension, however, is not simply the opposition between subject and object, but the consciousness of itself as that opposition. This of course in keeping with the notion – in line with the internal reflexivity that defines the concept of *Geist* – that what counts as self-identity is not just the identity itself but the consciousness of that identity. In this case, to be sure, the identity in question is the *non-identity* of subject and object. The act of self-comprehension is thus not only internally deficient but also the consciousness of itself as deficient and, indeed, alienated (PS, 365). In the self-consciousness of a political lifeform, learning and degeneration (*Verderben*) 'always go hand in hand' (LPWH, 61).

One consequence of this understanding of self-comprehension is that the self also contains an awareness of a need to correct its internal deficiency. Aspiring to a reconciled

identity despite (and because of) its experienced 'fragmentation' (LPWH, 82), the self, which *qua* principle of unity 'cannot remain in a state of opposition' (LPWH, 62), calls forth its own correction. This demand, to be sure, is not accompanied by an appreciation of the content of that correction. That is available only to a future lifeform, one able to surmount the oppositions that grip the earlier lifeform. At best, an existing form of life possesses only an inchoate apprehension of its possible correction – a 'vague foreshadowing of something unknown', an anticipation of 'an approaching change' (PS, 7 amended). Yet, if an existing form of life cannot conceptualize the solution to its deficiencies, it is nonetheless acquainted with those deficiencies, whose parameters become all the more clear as the lifeform further attends to its own identity. Inasmuch as it does appreciate those deficiencies, it also recognizes the need for their correction, thereby contributing to the emergence of a new form of life able to offer correction. 'Through knowledge spirit makes manifest a distinction between knowledge and that which is; this knowledge is thus what produces a new form of development' (LHP1 I, 54f).¹⁰ No individual lifeform can remove the taste of the 'bitter draught' of self-destruction that flows from its own self-actualization. Through its implicit and abiding sense of self, however, it retains an 'infinite thirst' for reconciliation, and this in turn 'heralds the birth of a new principle' (LPWH, 63).

Far from denying the role played by one form of life in generating the corrective agency of its successor, Hegel also asserts that the latter depends for its own existence on the former. As a stage in the history of the consciousness of freedom, a later lifeform establishes itself only as it becomes aware of itself *as* a higher stage of development. It possesses that awareness, however, only as it also appreciates the deficiencies of its predecessors, which themselves emerge – also consistent with an account of history as the consciousness of freedom – only as the previous lifeform knows itself as deficient and in need of correction. In this case as well, then, the retrospective knowledge supplied by a later lifeform – consistent with Hegel's notion of philosophy as a 'circle of circles' (EL, §15) – is itself prospectively generated. Included in a community's consciousness of its bifurcated status, and thus its deficient realization of freedom, is also the initiation of its subsequent rectification. 'The completion of an act of comprehension is at the same time its alienation *and* transition' (PR, §343; my emphasis).

These considerations further attest to the metaphilosophical dimension of Hegel's political philosophy. Central to the self-identity of a particular form of life is a reflexivity that gives voice to the open-endedness and commitment to revisability that also informs Hegel's general account of self-reflexive rationality. True, no particular lifeform can ever fully make itself an object of reflection. Any more comprehensive reflection on the part of a particular community is achievable only retrospectively, by a subsequent lifeform. But Hegel does not thereby countenance the type of external reflection at odds with his metaphilosophy. Even the reference to the more comprehensive reflection performed later is effectuated through the self-reflexivity of the original lifeform. Part of the self-conscious identity of a community, including that pertaining to the conflict inherent in its self-consciousness as both subject and object of reflection, is a sense of self-alienation, and it is this alienated consciousness that triggers the need for correction, something forthcoming only from a later lifeform with sufficient historical remove. In line with the conception of metaphilosophical

reflexivity, one particular form of life does indeed participate in 'the labour of its own transformation' (PS, 6).

Hegel's account of historical development also reflects his conception of determinate negation, itself a core component of the metaphilosophy. According to this conception, a deficient claim or state of affairs is corrected and replaced, not in its simple repudiation, but through further cultivating its existing albeit inadequately realized potential. As opposed to an external or abstract negation, a determinate negation – also termed 'immanent transcendence' – takes the form of a sublation or supersession (*Aufhebung*), understood as annulment and preservation at once (EL, §81). In the present case one form of life surpasses a predecessor, not simply in repudiating it, but in better actualizing the principle of freedom – selfhood in otherness – that is present but deficiently articulated in the life of a predecessor. The subsequent form of life bears witness to a lethargy and lack of vitality expressed in the bifurcated self-relationship made manifest in its predecessor's activity of self-comprehension. Yet, if the later stage revivifies a sense of unity absent in the life of a predecessor, it does so not by rejecting the revealed tensions and oppositions but by integrating them into a more differentiated account of unity. History is a progress in the consciousness of freedom just because participants fashion more expansive, inclusive and far-reaching understandings of the relationship of self and other.

Furthermore, this process of developmental sublation is not one that is simply known to or performed by a theoretical observer. Central to Hegel's conception of determinate negation is also that the subject matter enacts its own supersession; sublation is indeed 'self-sublation' (EL, §81). Not only does a history understood as progress in the consciousness of freedom depend on processes by which members of existing lifeforms establish and authenticate their own freedom; they do so only inasmuch as they understand themselves and the existing stage they instantiate as an advance in the history of freedom. Yet, such knowledge is itself achievable only in reference to the past. Not only does one form of life know itself as a developmental advance only by way of an appreciation of the limitations of a prior lifeform but also those limitations themselves assume reality and become known historically only as the prior stage appreciates both its own limitations and the need for their correction. Central to the immanent transcendence specific to the process of historical development is that an existing stage contributes actively and, however imperfectly, knowingly to that transcendence.

In his account of world history – the concluding section of the *Philosophy of Right* – Hegel asserts that, while the philosophical historian may proceed hypothetically from the 'simple idea' that history is rational, the actual 'proof' for that idea 'is to be found in the study of world history itself' (LPWH, 29). In line with an account of history construed as progress in the consciousness of freedom, proof in this case consists in a process of immanent self-certification – 'the movement which reflects itself into itself' (PS, 489; see Buchwalter 2012: 238–240). Here, too, Hegel's political philosophy accords with the process of philosophical self-grounding central to his programme of metaphilosophy.

Conclusion

Hegel's philosophy is distinctive in part because it can itself be construed as a species of metaphilosophy. Philosophical reflection on the spheres of thought and reality that comprise a philosophical science is accompanied by and consummated in ongoing reflection on that very reflection. Hegel most fully elaborates the lineaments of such philosophical self-reflexivity in the final paragraphs of the doctrine of absolute spirit, which details an account of thought whose content subsists precisely in its processes of self-knowledge and self-production. Yet, if the conjunction of philosophy and metaphilosophical reflexivity acquires quintessential expression in the doctrine of absolute spirit, it infuses the *modus operandi* of Hegel's philosophical system in its entirety. It does so, however, in ways that are specific to the philosophical object domain in question. In this chapter I have sought to sketch the manner in which Hegel deploys the metaphilosophical resources of his thought by delineating elements of his political philosophy, whose 'systemic' name is the doctrine of objective spirit. At issue is the manner in which the mode of absolute or 'infinite' self-reflection is elaborated for an account of freedom realized in the 'finite' and historically conditioned realm of sociopolitical life. I have pursued this theme by focusing on four issues: the idea of historically realized freedom itself, the concept of self-productive agency as instantiated in the sphere of the political and ethical life in particular, the ongoing and open-ended reflexivity specific to the phenomenon of historically realized freedom, and the manner in which the *post festum* retrospectivity that Hegel claims is appropriate to philosophical comprehension in the domain of the political also exhibits a prospectivity on the part a subject matter shaped by its own internal reflexivity. Informing each undertaking has been an effort to clarify the connection between Hegel's logico-metaphysical assumptions and his political commitments. In recent years clarification of this connection has commanded the attention of scholars interested in explicating the method and logic of the political philosophy (see Buchwalter 2018). Little attention, however, has been accorded to the question of how the political philosophy reflects and instantiates Hegel's conception of metaphilosophy. If only in a small way, this chapter has sought to fill this lacuna.

Notes

- 1 The *Philosophy of Mind* is cited here and throughout according to the Miller and Wallace translation (1971).
- 2 The *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* are cited here and throughout according to the Haldane and Simson translation (1983).
- 3 The *Philosophy of Right* is cited here and throughout according to the Nisbet translation.
- 4 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is cited here and throughout according to the Geraets, Suchting and Harris translation.
- 5 The *Science of Logic* is cited here and throughout according to the Miller translation.

- 6 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is cited here and throughout according to the Miller translation.
- 7 The *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* are quoted according to Stewart and Hodgson's translation (2012).
- 8 In her *Critique of Forms of Life* R. Jaeggi appeals to Hegel to note a problem-solving future orientation inherent in existing forms of life (Jaeggi 2018: esp. Part IV). The present analysis has affinities with Jaeggi's approach, even if it appeals more to Hegel's idea of internal reflexivity to detail a dialectical relationship between retrospective and prospective forms of social knowledge and understanding.
- 9 The following discussion has affinities with that of Ware (1996), one of the few efforts to detail the metaphilosophical dimension of Hegel's account of the historicity of reason. Yet, while Ware focuses on that dimension in Hegel's treatment of the history of philosophy, this chapter does so more with regard to the political philosophy.
- 10 Hegel presents a version of this same argument in his treatment of the transition from civil society to state in the *Philosophy of Right*. See Buchwalter (2017).

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The Role of Religion in the Process of Self-Knowledge of Hegel's Philosophy

Francesca Menegoni

Religion and absolute spirit

In Hegel's analysis of art, religion and philosophy, absolute spirit is one of the aspects that was controversial for Hegel's contemporaries and seems of little relevance for us today. This applies even more to the section on revealed religion, and to the three 'theological' syllogisms introduced in the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline* (1830).¹ The whole section on revealed religion seems indeed either to present outdated metaphysics² or, at most, only to deserve historiographical appreciation. In a form that is anything but clear, it provides a significant document of a debate about 'matters of religion', whose prominence, gained during Hegel's Berlin years and immediately following his death, gradually faded away. Moreover, it represents the battleground between two harshly conflicting interpretations, which are amongst the reasons why this sphere is one of the facets of Hegelian thought we might find least germane today: (a) Hegel's philosophy is grounded in Christian dogma and (b) Hegel analyses religion philosophically just to provide a secular approach to religious contents.

Indeed, elements that substantiate either interpretation are not hard to find in Hegel's text. Perhaps the most significant example is provided in the long remark that concludes the section on the objective spirit and marks the passage to the absolute spirit. The remark to §552 can be invoked by an argument such as that which Ludwig Feuerbach was to advance in *The Essence of Christianity*: religion is just an illusion that the philosophy of the future would unmask. But the same paragraph can generate the idea that Hegel's use of Christian religion is nothing more than an expedient to uphold the primacy of philosophy over religion. In sharp contrast to the concision that marks the *Encyclopaedia* as a whole, this remark dwells at considerable length on the complex relationships between religion and the state, Catholicism and the Lutheran Church, ethical life and religion. On the one hand, Hegel maintains that it is futile to look for genuine religion and religiosity outside the ethical spirit; on the other hand, he claims that religion is the essence of both ethical life and the state. As several studies

have shown,³ the fact that Hegel's text on religion offers contrasting possibilities for interpretation has led to a tendency to sketch it in some very broad outlines, labelling Hegel's philosophy as either religious fundamentalism or rational functionalism. In either case, however, this divests Hegel's thinking of quite a few of its relevant features and undermines the attempt to apply its insights.

To escape this impasse, it is essential to shift our focus from the polemic to the epistemic approach.⁴ This methodological revision is necessary, as philosophy must set out its aims, content and methods in clear terms. Even more than other philosophical subjects, analysing the relationship between philosophy and religion requires that philosophy define itself. When investigating religion, philosophy faces a far greater challenge than it would with other phenomena or aspects of reality (such as the philosophy of natural and human sciences, the philosophy of art and so on): religion offers elements that transcend its historical determinations and deals with universal meanings and values. Hegel takes this challenge seriously; he identifies primary aspects of philosophy's self-knowledge precisely in the connection between philosophy and religion.

In the following pages, I will not address these questions historiographically – although it is difficult to separate Hegel's analyses from their historical setting.⁵ Rather, I will outline the philosophical point of Hegel's examination of religion. Since Hegel's philosophy of religion springs from the desire 'to know and comprehend the religion that already *exists* [*die Religion, die IST*]' (LPR I, 91; VPR, 10).⁶ Christianity – which Hegel refers to as 'consummate religion' (*vollkommene Religion*) – seems to be the most obvious reference in nineteenth-century Prussia. Hegel's interpretation of Christianity does not mean to stress Christianity's primacy over other religions from a theological perspective; rather, it takes Christianity to be the culmination of a cultural movement that establishes the unity between Being and Thinking, Substance and Subject. This very unity matches the pinnacle of the speculative programme developed in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *The Science of Logic*,⁷ which is utterly speculative. This completion – the definition of Christianity as being the consummate religion – should thus be understood as the fulfilment of a project whose aim is entirely philosophical: it would be misleading to think of it as if it were motivated by religious biases. Hegel's perspective is instead chiefly philosophical and is driven by the desire to rank his own philosophy within the long history of Western thought.

With this aim in mind, I will attempt to interpret Hegel's interpretation of Christian religion in light of his philosophical project. The argument I will advance is that the Berlin writings' treatment of religion does not produce critical assessments like those to be found in the early writings. Rather, Hegel's mature philosophy aims at reflecting on itself and presenting its own self-justification. To uphold my interpretation, I will analyse the relationship between religion and philosophy as presented both in the Absolute Spirit in the *Encyclopaedia* (1830) and in the Berlin Lectures. This will lead us (a) to define the distinct function that religion fulfils in the process of spirit's self-knowing, and (b) to appreciate the relevance of religion in a further process of self-knowledge that involves philosophy.

The self-consciousness of the spirit

What function does Hegel's analysis of religion fulfil in the self-knowledge of the spirit? More generally, what does this process entail?

Hegel regards the knowledge of the spirit as both the most concrete and the most ambitious knowledge.⁸ This knowledge is not simply a question of identifying specific capacities of the single individual (traits, inclinations, passions and so forth) or of mankind in general, but it involves the definition of the essence of man, namely his substantial principle. This element is present in all spiritual manifestations, from the simplest and most immediate to the richest and most complex, as the latter are already present *in nuce* in the initial stages of spirit's development (e.g. the forms of consciousness can already be identified in natural waking, religious and ethical values in sensation).⁹ In this sense, the spirit is not only consciousness but also – and above all – self-consciousness and relation-with-the-other, hence it is the fruit of the awareness of its own individuality and personal identity in its other: it is the mutual recognition of the 'I' in the 'We', and of the 'We' in the 'I'.

In the end, spirit is process, movement, life, infinite self-relation and self-manifestation. What characterizes it is the fact that its essence is not different from its manifestation; consequently, the spirit does not reveal something other than itself because its content is its own revelation. Hegel notes that 'if the word *spirit* is to have a sense at all, then spirit implies the revelation of itself' (EPM, §564 R; translation modified). Hence, we see that the spirit is spirit only to the extent that 'it is *for* the spirit' (EPM, §564). In other words, it manifests its very self to itself. Accordingly, this self-manifesting, this revealing itself, is the spirit's quintessential action because '*a spirit that is not revelatory is not spirit*' (LPR III, 170).¹⁰

The 1824 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* draw on two concepts to explain this broad notion of revelation: *determining oneself* and *to be for an other*: "Offenbaren" heißt, sich bestimmen, zu sein für ein Anderes' (LPR III, 170). Revealing or self-manifesting belongs to the essence of spirit itself: 'dies Offenbaren, sich Manifestieren, gehört zum Wesen des Geistes selbst' (LPR III, 170). If revealing means *determining oneself*, this action entails that one allows oneself to be seen and to be heard. Revelation thus has to do, constitutively, with sensibility.¹¹ Moreover, if the revealing that is the essence of spirit is *being for an other*, this means that renouncing one's exclusive individuality is a constitutive part of the essence of spirit: there is no self-manifestation that does not include openness to otherness. For Hegel, revelation means allowing oneself to be seen, to be heard and being for an other or, in other words, it means being open to the otherness; this is the result of the revelation of the spirit that all determinations of the spirit (subjective, objective, absolute) share. Spirit's self-manifestation is the all-encompassing dimension in which all elements converge and gain distinctiveness.

So far, however, nothing has been said about the way in which the different determinations of the spirit relate to each other and how they differ from each other. With regard to this issue, the *Encyclopaedia* offers an extensive discussion, though for the sake of concision we are obliged to limit ourselves to the last spheres of the absolute spirit, namely religion and philosophy. Hegel's writings on these topics, from

his pre-systematic works to those of his maturity, cover a wide range of themes – from the historical-political to the theological and logical-speculative – and have sparked centuries of debates. We will focus on only a few fundamental issues.

First, Hegel claims that religion and philosophy share the same content because ‘both have the *truth* for their object, and more precisely the truth in the highest sense, in the sense that *God* and *God alone* is the truth. Moreover, both treat the sphere of finite things, the sphere of *nature* and the *human spirit*, their relation to each other and to God as their truth’ (EL, §1). Second, religion and philosophy are closely related, as both have their roots in thinking.¹² This does not mean that religion is a consequence of philosophy; on the contrary, religion comes first in time and retains its independence. In point of fact, Hegel writes in the 1827 ‘Preface’ to the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that religion can exist without philosophy, but philosophy cannot exist without religion. Philosophy and religion are distinct, though they share a common ground. This is not a question of knowledge trumping belief; far from it. Understanding religion is the most important task for thought and knowledge. In religion, philosophy seeks to balance the infinite in the finite and the finite in the infinite, and to reconcile religious feeling with reason. That aim is the reason for which philosophy itself exists.

From its earliest formulations, Hegel’s philosophy tasks religion with ridding us of the opposition of finite and infinite – which intellectual thought is unable to do – and with enabling the passage between finite life and infinite life. In this regard, it would be a mistake to think that the task of religion is to rid us of the opposition between the finite and the infinite as two contrasting domains. This theme had already been outlined in some of the Frankfurt fragments, which introduced a key concept of Hegelian philosophy. This is the concept of life, a concept capable of holding unity and distinction together, as expressed by Hegel’s definition of life as the union of union and non-union. This was an early attempt to combine the need for unification with the recognition of the necessity of otherness and negation. The concept of life is thus fundamental to the definition of religion, as the elevation of finite *life* to infinite *life*. This notion, of elevation from life to life, marks a conquest, which as we will see, will inform the entire future course of Hegel’s speculative journey. Life is the link between the finite and the infinite, and it is what permits us to think of their relationship, not in terms of their antithesis but with reference to what they have in common. ‘This self-elevation of man, not from the finite to the infinite (for these terms are only products of mere reflection, and as such their separation is absolute), but from finite life to infinite life, is religion’ (FS, Text 63, 343).

This set of insights culminates in the affirmation that philosophy, as the expression of abstract and abstractive thinking, ‘has to stop short of religion’ (FS, Text 63, 344). It is, in fact, quite clear to Hegel that if the elevation that takes place in religion is transferred into a conceptual reflection, this move results in an antagonism that is intolerable for the human spirit, which cannot bear the idea that what it considers to be its very being (the living bond between finite and infinite) could be fixed by an insurmountable contradiction: hence, when the separation is infinite, ‘the opposition persists, the opposition of the absolutely finite to the absolutely infinite’ (FS, Text 63, 348).

This idea accompanies the following stages of Hegel's work and is also reflected in his terminology: hence the effort to avoid expressions that might bear traces of finitude and relativity. This is true, for instance, of the theological concept of creation, which connotes a particular form of action, in which God is neither opposed to an other-than-himself, as the internal opposes the external, nor is his activity purposeful or exerted on a particular matter. Divine action is absolute activity, infinitely self-differentiating: God is 'the eternal creator, the eternal act of self-revelation', unending *Actus*.¹³ This absolute activity, which by being self-differentiating, remains with itself, is a model of that activity akin to that of thinking, which does not depend on anything external and has no need of a given matter, as it is its own content and its own end. The divine creative action is as free as the activity of thought.

A further example of overcoming the limits of a thinking that is based on finitude is the question of the elevation of the human spirit to God. Hegel expounds on this theme in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and in the 1829 *Lectures on the Proof of the Existence of God*. In these writings, Hegel objects to those who claim we can know nothing of God: if religion were only a turning to God without knowing anything about him, it would be nothing more than 'a drawing out of the lines of longing into space'. At the same time, however, he agrees with Kant: if we reify, hypostatize and personify the idea of God, we risk turning God into an object. As a consequence, on the one hand God would be opposed to the subject that represents him, and on the other hand he would eventually be assigned the same status as the representing subject. In fact, Hegel states that the existence of God cannot be proven in the same way we prove that something concrete exists.

Methodologically, this leads Hegel to consider not the thing that is to be proven, but rather the process of proof itself. That of God is a very particular kind of proof. In the elevation of human spirit to God, the activity to be proven is not external to the *demonstrandum*. In fact, this very activity is the consciousness of the proper movement of the object that we are dealing with. What makes this proof unique is the nature of its object, which is not a passive object, but is the elevation of the human spirit to God; thus, it is an activity, a course of action, a process. Subjective proof, on the contrary, remains outside its object and is extraneous to its becoming. It can only grasp phenomena and is absolutely inadequate to fully express the process of the human spirit's elevation to God.

According to Hegel, the only proof that can demonstrate the existence of God must outline the movement of absolute reflection, which does not require a leap of faith or an ecstatic experience, or at the opposite pole, the negation of transcendence. What this proof requires is instead circularity, the absence of presuppositions, mediation. To avoid the absolutization of the finite, the nature of the latter must be made explicit: the finite must perish, namely its non-being must be understood without eternalizing it. In this sense, by demanding that the fixity of the finite be annihilated, absolute reflection does nothing but grasping its proper determination. In turn, the elevation of the human spirit to God is accomplished by acknowledging the need for everything that partakes of finitude to perish, thus avoiding as well turning the infinite itself into something finite. Hegel's thinking about religion in *The Science of Logic* and throughout his subsequent philosophical works led him to see this elevation as differing from any

form of immediate apprehension of God. Rather, this elevation deals with knowledge, reasoning and mediation, which all support the human spirit's elevation to God in the very activity of proving.

Religion and culture

The formal differences between religion and philosophy, as well as their points of contact, begin to take shape.

In addressing this complex topic, I will start with a passage from the *Encyclopaedia* that introduces the nature of philosophy when it deals with religion.

The philosophy of religion has to discern the logical necessity in the progression of the determinations of the essence known as the absolute. It has to ascertain the determinations to which a particular kind of worship primarily corresponds. It has to discover how worldly self-consciousness, consciousness of what is the supreme determination of man, and hence how the nature of a people's ethical life, the principle of its law, of its actual freedom and of its constitution, as well as of its art and science, correspond to the principle that constitutes the substance of a religion. That all these moments of a people's actuality make up *one* systematic totality and that *one* spirit creates and informs them, this insight lies at the basis of the further insight that the history of religions coincides with world-history.

(EPM, §562 R)

Here we have a clear outline of the role that the philosophy of religion plays in the process of spirit's self-knowing. Hegel's thesis is that religion first brings together what for an individual, a community or a nation carries spiritual value – for example, the awareness of one's own destiny, the legal and political institutions that promote and safeguard freedom, art and science – and then retains it in a synthetic unity. This synthetic unity – which Hegel calls a 'systematic totality' – corresponds to the principle that constitutes the substance of a religion.

It matters very little if this passage appears in the subsection on art, which specifically refers to the religion of art and that for Hegel corresponds to classical Greek culture. This narrow historical horizon broadens in the passage's concluding words, where Hegel states that 'the history of religions coincides with world-history'. If this is so, then religion expresses the cultural identity of not only a people but of *every* people.

In any case, this interpretation does not appear only in this passage of the *Encyclopaedia*, but it is also crucial in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the path that leads from naïve consciousness to knowledge, Hegel clearly assigns a fundamental role to the section on religion: in the economy of the text, religion gains relevance over the previous moments (consciousness, self-consciousness, reason and spirit) not just because it presupposes them, but mainly because it can turn them into a totality that brings together all the epistemic, experiential and practical achievements that were expressed in each preceding moment. This is why spirit represents itself in religion and presents the form of its self-consciousness in religion. Religion expresses the totality

of the moments of the entire phenomenological course by means of a single principle; this totality – ‘their totality, *taken all together*’ (*zusammengefaßte Totalität*) – is ‘*simple*’ (*einfache*) because it assigns the meaning of the entire phenomenal itinerary to a simple concept. In this sense, religion expresses the ‘absolute self’ (*das absolute Selbst*) (PS, 393), it is the identity of an extensive legacy of personal experiences, cultures and institutions that reach their synthesis in it.

Thus, religion not only labels a cultural phenomenon but also can extend its semantic boundaries to designate ‘culture itself in its concrete appearing and historical unfolding. At the limit of this process of extension, the plural “religions” designates the very plurality of cultures’ (Olivetti 2013: 165). So writes Marco M. Olivetti, arguing that there is a circular relationship between religion and culture, a relationship that also holds for art and science, but which is particularly meaningful for religion. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that religion is the genetic code of culture and, in another sense, that culture is symbolized in religion as if religion were a synecdoche – a part that stands for the whole – in which the religious symbol stands for all of culture. When Hegel defines religion as an ‘absolute self’ in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is precisely this synecdoche that he is affirming: religion is the part that can express the whole of a culture and enables spirit to arrive at self-knowledge.

As an interpretive model, the circular relationship between religion and culture synecdochally expressed is less well known than the linear model that has been favoured ever since the Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century founding fathers of the human sciences. In the linear model, religion – taken as archaic and fable-like – precedes and is eventually superseded by objective, critical science. In keeping with the Enlightenment idea of progress, culture entails going beyond both historical-positive religions and religion in general. Clearly, then, the culture of secularized society tends to define itself as metacultural.

Indebted to the conquests of the Enlightenment and Kantian philosophy, the linear interpretive model plays a fundamental role in reason’s coming of age. In fact, Hegel relies heavily on such a model. Given the latter’s holistic character, however, it also makes room for the circular model, as is presented both in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the remark to §562 of the *Encyclopaedia*. In the circular model, religion expresses the totality of the elements that make up the culture of a community, which in turn expresses its spiritual identity in religion. This identity stems from the fact that a given religion collects, unifies and expresses everything that constitutes the consummate determination of a community, and it does so in the form of self-knowledge, which includes laws, rights, constitutions, art, science and all of the aspects of the culture that create the spirit of an age.

The synecdochal relationship that ties religion, culture and spirit tightly together helps us understand what Hegel means when he writes:

The absolute is spirit. This is the highest definition of the absolute. To find this definition and to comprehend its meaning and content was, we may say, the absolute tendency of all culture and philosophy; it was the point towards which all religion and science pressed on; only this impetus enables us to comprehend the history of the world.

(EPM, §384 R; translation modified)

Saying that *the absolute is spirit* means having found a definition of the absolute that ranks above those that equate it with being or with essence, as only this definition shows us that the freedom and creativity of the human spirit have been the driving forces behind all cultures, philosophical inquiries, religions and sciences in the history of the world.

Representation and concept

The circular model linking religion and culture makes its appearance in the opening paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia*, where Hegel writes that religion and philosophy both have truth as their object, differing only in the form whereby this is known. This assertion is stated in the remark to §384 quoted above, which ends with this well-known passage:

The word 'spirit', and the *representation* of spirit, were found early on, and the content of the Christian religion is to make God known as spirit. It is the task of philosophy to grasp in its own element, the concept, what is here *given* to representation and what is *in itself* the essence. That problem is not genuinely and immanently solved until freedom and the concept become the object and the soul of philosophy.

(EPM, §384 R; translation modified)

Here, Hegel distinguishes between representation and concept: the former is the distinct form of religion, while the latter is specific to philosophy. Furthermore, he notes that philosophy must make the content of religion – a content designated by the terms God, spirit and essence – known in conceptual form. The concluding remarks emphasize how complex translating representation into concept is, and how daunting this philosophical challenge appears: the task poses a problem that cannot be genuinely and immanently solved unless freedom and concept become the object and soul of philosophy.

To understand the meaning of this specific operation of translation, we must reflect again on what we read in the remark to §562: 'The philosophy of religion has to discern the logical necessity in the progression of the determinations of the essence known as the absolute' and establish 'the determinations to which a particular kind of worship primarily corresponds'. Both in the past and in more recent years, theologians have raised objections precisely to this conceptual translation, which forms the basis for a philosophical interpretation of the absolute essence – God – from a logical standpoint. Hegel's philosophy has thus been accused of reducing inscrutable divine action and the mystery of faith to abstract logical necessity.¹⁴

If we read this passage as an anticipation of what the *Encyclopaedia* presents, these criticisms appear justified to some extent: the text introduces a formalization of the content of Christian dogma (the Trinity, God the Creator, God the Saviour) in the three 'theological' syllogisms, which should eventually constitute a single syllogism. This syllogism, however, is unable to establish a fully circular link between the three

moments of universality, particularity and singularity, precisely because the terms in question are exposed in representative form and thus cannot be completely formalized. In these syllogisms, Hegel presents the revelation of the spirit using figures (*Gestalten*) in a sequence set to the rhythm of a timeless history: the Creation, the breaking of the covenant, the reconciliation through the intervention of the divine mediator. The set of *Gestalten*, whereby spirit manifests itself, is the topic of revealed religion. In turn, it makes an objective totality; it is the presupposition that the subject assumes when he approaches faith as something totally alien. Therefore, religion is a representation that does indeed exist for the subject, but it exists as something independent of her/him because it falls outside her/his self-consciousness. Consequently, consciousness perceives such content as something unrelated to itself, as if the latter were a truth to be intuited but in which that consciousness cannot find itself. 'This objective totality is the *presupposition*, a presupposition that is in itself, for the *finite* immediacy of the individual subject. For the subject therefore it is initially something *other* and *intuited*' (EPM, §570). Here again, a dynamic arises that echoes that which we find in the pages dedicated to the unhappy consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* or in other equally well-known writings from the Jena period – from *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* to *Faith and Knowledge*. If the subject approaches the intuited or represented truth as something other than herself/himself, she/he thereupon considers herself/himself as nothing, as evil, as something ontologically negative or worthless. The result of the split between the essential and non-essential, intuited truth and intuiting subject, is clear: only one of the members of the relationship (the intuited truth, in this case) is assigned meaning and value; the other one (i.e. the individual subject that intuits the truth) is deprived of meaning. In this dynamic, the subject of the relationship puts herself/himself entirely on the side of the inessential and asserts her/his nothingness.

Faced with this irreconcilable dualism, we are obliged to shift to another perspective, whereby speculative knowledge enlists the concept to define and justify what in the Christian religion is given in non-conceptual form. We will thus return again to the remark to §562 or, in other words, to the twofold requirement, according to which the philosophy of religion must grasp the logical necessity of the absolute's process of self-determining and – what is even more cryptic – that it must connect these determinations with the specific worship.

The elevation of the human spirit to God

How this programme is to be pursued is not explained in the few scant paragraphs dealing with revealed religion in the *Encyclopaedia*. Instead, a hint is given in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and, even more so, in the course of lectures on the proofs of the existence of God: a course that, as we know, Hegel held while teaching logic and, more importantly, during his revision of *The Science of Logic*.

The course is decisive, not just for the subject covered but also for the radical way it expounds some of the core speculative notions of Hegel's philosophy, such as the definition of the absolute, the link between finite and infinite, and the relationship

between necessity and freedom. It thus holds an interest that goes well beyond the narrow sphere of arguments developed by the philosophical tradition to prove *via rationis* the existence of the Highest Being. Moreover, the course is informed by the desire to demonstrate what is really at stake in the proofs of the existence of God. For Hegel, they display nothing but the description of the elevation of thinking spirit to that which is itself the highest thought: God. This elevation is then an elevation of thought and takes place in the kingdom of thought.

The first lecture sets out the theme and goals to be pursued: the proofs of the existence of God should entail the elevation of the spirit of man to God (*die Erhebung des Menschengesistes zu Gott*) and must express this elevation not just as an experience of faith, but for thought. This premise is advanced several times in Hegel's writings, starting from the earlier *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1821:

In thinking, I raise myself above all that is finite to the absolute and am *infinite consciousness*, while at the same time I am *finite self-consciousness* ... These two sides seek each other and flee from each other. I am this conflict and this conciliation, which exist in myself and for myself (I myself as infinite am opposed to myself as finite, and as finite consciousness am opposed to myself, to my thinking and consciousness, as infinite).

(LPR III, 212)

The human spirit's elevation to God is thus a process that cannot be grounded by subjective proof, which in turn remains distinct and external to the object it examines and can only grasp aggregates of relations or, to put it differently, phenomena. The elevation of thinking to the absolute means instead overcoming the subjectivity of knowledge. Hegel's analysis of the proof of the existence of God fits into this framework, whose primary aim is to advance past Kantian gnoseology. Following the route taken by Kant in criticizing the proofs of the existence of God – and in particular, his refutation of the ontological proof as being based on the form of judgement, which, as Kant claims, is incapable of inferring the existence of God from the concept of God – Hegel takes it a step further, proposing that one must dispose of judgement and embrace speculative logic, as it alone can express the identity of thought and being. Speculative logic alone, in fact, can bring about the elevation of the human spirit to God: circularity, the absence of presuppositions and mediation characterize speculative logic and stand at the core of Hegel's argument, which hinges on the nature of the *Erhebung* as such.

As a result, the identity of thinking and being cannot consist in the relation that ties a predicate to a subject. Rather, it expresses the movement of absolute reflection, which does not require an ecstatic experience or, at the opposite pole, the absolutization of finite human nature. This movement belongs as much to thought as it does to being; it demands that the claimed fixity of the finite be annihilated, given that this fixity absolutizes the finite and turns the infinite into something finite. This movement involves the necessary overcoming of both the unilaterality of finite knowledge and subjectivity in general, so that anything finite ceases to be. What the *Erhebung* shows is therefore anything but the vanishing of the finite, its non-being.

The error of finite understanding consists in considering the finite true. The result is that finite reason would never reach the infinite, while the latter would remain forever outside its boundaries. By contrast, speculative logic demands the *necessary* overcoming the finite, and in doing so it raises the human spirit to God by means of the notion of absolute necessity. Hence the affirmation: 'the absolutely necessary is, because it is' (LPG, 132; GW18, 307). Apparently paradoxical, this affirmation concludes the fifteenth lecture and is the only legitimate proof of the human spirit's elevation to the thought of the absolutely necessary starting from a finitude whose essence is expressed by the need to overcome itself.

In the last lecture, Hegel harks back to one of his earliest ideas to explain the nature of this absolute necessity. He notes that absolute necessity is represented as Fate in the religion of the ancient Greeks, as if to claim that it must be considered something supreme and ultimate to which all spiritual forces are subordinate. Absolute necessity belongs only to Fate. The submission to the necessity of Fate entails abandoning the pursuit of particular ends and interests, and also marks the transfiguration of necessity into freedom. This is the distinct freedom that characterizes human spiritual elevation to God. Undoubtedly, this transfiguration of necessity into freedom is influenced by Spinoza's conception of freedom, which being identical to absolute necessity, belongs to the divine substance. Yet, Hegel's thought adds a unique feature to the Spinozian equation of absolute necessity with freedom: freedom and absolute necessity do not belong to the subject, but are the outcome of a process that culminates in the finite self-transcendence which eventually captures the meaning of human spirit's elevation to God.

This elevation, which takes place in the concept of absolute necessity, addresses the problem posed by the task of philosophy as outlined in the remark to §384 of the *Encyclopaedia*. This problem 'is not genuinely and immanently solved until freedom and the concept become the object and the soul of philosophy'. Only a philosophy that urges us to think of the 'transfiguration of necessity into freedom' and, accordingly, only a philosophy that accomplishes ethical and cognitive emancipation, can frame conceptually what religion presents through its narratives, historical documents and acts of worship. Consequently, only a philosophy that is fully aware of its identity and its methods can express in its language that truth-content which religion expresses in its own forms.

The contribution that religion offers is finally evident. It contributes to the self-knowledge process that spirit undergoes while it reflects on its own manifestations, but it also promotes philosophy's self-understanding as it allows philosophy to reflect on its own nature. By dealing with the contents of the Christian religion – which is defined as absolute and consummate for the reasons we have outlined above – Hegel's philosophy does not shirk the challenge of using conceptual means to understand absoluteness. Moreover, as the concept of absolute necessity that stands at the culmination of the process of *Erhebung des Menschengesistes zu Gott* demonstrates, Hegel accepts the challenge by placing himself within the tradition that leads from classical Greece to the modern age.

Ultimately, what makes the human spiritual elevation to God possible is a broad concept of revelation, which – as we have seen – is the point where religion and

philosophy converge. Both religion and philosophy are manifestations of the spirit that reveals itself in them. This last point is the key achievement of philosophical reflection on religion and a significant improvement in philosophy's process of self-knowledge. Therefore, understanding the significance of the revelation of spirit in the diversity of cultures and religions is one of the challenges today's philosophy might try to tackle.

Notes

- 1 See EPM, §§567–571. The three syllogisms presented in the section on *geoffenbarte Religion* are generally referred to as 'theological', to distinguish them from the 'philosophical' syllogisms that conclude the sphere of absolute spirit (EPM, §§575–577). The *Philosophy of Mind*, as Part Three of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation.
- 2 The reasons for the current relevance or lack thereof of the philosophy of the absolute spirit is discussed from a variety of perspectives in Oehl and Kok (2018).
- 3 In this regard, see T.M. Schmidt (1997), K.J. Schmidt (2004), Hodgson (2005) and Wallace (2005). A masterful summary of the differences between the interpretations that see the centrality of Christian theology at the basis of the Hegelian system, those that assign primacy to atheism, and those that seek an uneasy balance between the two extremes can be found in Vieillard-Baron (2006).
- 4 Attempts in this direction can be found in Mooren (2018), which deals with the nexus between (Christian) theology and philosophy, and Plevrakis (2017), which seeks to go beyond the theism vs atheism dilemma.
- 5 For a review of the debates on religious matters between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Jaeschke (1993, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2003), Jaeschke and Arndt (2012).
- 6 Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are quoted according to Brown, Hodgson, Stewart's translation. The German edition followed is Jaeschke's edited 3 volumes (VPR I–III).
- 7 In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, consummate religion is *offenbare Religion*, revealed religion in which the truth shows itself unveiled, because in it neither the subject disappears and passes over into substance nor does substance disappear and pass over into subject, but substance becomes subject. In the phenomenological view, God manifests himself in the *Menschwerdung Gottes*, the incarnation, as a singular individual Self and assumes that radical otherness which is sensible nature. In becoming absolutely other, God maintains his self-identity, preserving his divine nature, and at the same time is for the other-than-self, or in other words, for the individual man and for all mankind. By revealing himself in Christ, God becomes visible in a real man, so that 'the faithful consciousness sees, feels, and hears this divinity': consciousness 'starts from the immediate present existence and takes cognizance of God in it' (PS, 435). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Pinkard and Baur's translation.
- 8 See EPM, §377.
- 9 See EPM, §380. The section on the subjective spirit proceeds from the spirit's awakening in sensation to its realization as free spirit. This progression is the

necessary condition for the spirit to acquire legal personality and become a moral subject capable of intentional action, ethical judgement, art, religion and science.

- 10 'Ein Geist, der nicht offenbar ist, ist nicht Geist' (VPR, 105).
- 11 For the sensible side of revelation as it relates to seeing and hearing, see Waldenfels (1996).
- 12 See EL, §2 R. The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
- 13 LPR, 170: 'It is said that God has created the world and has revealed himself. This is spoken of as something he did once, that will not happen again, and as being the sort of event that may either occur or not occur: God could have revealed himself, he could have created the world, or not; his doing so is one of his capricious, contingent characteristics, so to speak, and does not belong to the concept of God himself. But it is the essence of God as spirit *to be for an other*, i.e., *to reveal* himself. He does not create the world once and for all, but is the eternal creator, the eternal act of self-revelation. This *actus* is what he is: this is his concept, his definition. [True] religion is thus revelatory inasmuch as it is spirit *for* spirit. It is the religion of spirit—not a secret that has to remain closed but rather is open or revelatory and has to be for another, but for an other that is only momentarily so. God is this process of positing the other and then sublating it in his eternal movement.' The original German reads: 'Man sagt: "Gott hat die Welt erschaffen, hat sich geoffenbart" – so spricht man dies als einmal geschene Tat aus, die nicht wieder geschieht, als so eine Bestimmung, die sein kann oder nicht; Gott hätte sich offenbaren können, die Welt erschaffen können oder auch nicht; es ist eine gleichsam willkürliche, zufällige Bestimmung, die nicht zum Begriff Gottes selbst gehört. Aber Gott ist als Geist wesentliches dies, für ein Anderes zu sein, d. h. sich zu offenbaren; er erschafft nicht einmal die Welt, sondern er ist der ewige Schöpfer, dies ewige sich Offenbaren; er ist dies, dieser Actus. Dies ist sein Begriff, seine Bestimmung. Die Religion ist also die offenbare, denn sie ist Geist für den Geist. Sie ist Religion des Geistes und nicht das Geheime, verschlossen zu sein, sondern offenbar, zu sein für ein Anderes, welches aber nur momentan ein Anderes ist; Gott ist dieser Prozeß, setzt das Andere und hebt es auf in seiner ewigen Bewegung' (VPR, 105).
- 14 Mancuso (1996) recalls Hegel's 'doubtful repute' amongst theological thinkers. The charge that is usually levelled against Hegel is that of squeezing God into the straitjacket of logical necessity, thus losing sight of the grace and freedom of divine action and opening onto pantheism or atheism. The influence of the Barthian interpretation of Hegel (Barth 1947) that we see in Mancuso is also evident in other scholars, including Bruno Forte, who points out that if God's essence as spirit is such that he cannot but reveal himself, this means that his *Offenbarung* is not a free or gratuitous act, but a necessity: God must reveal himself and must reveal himself wholly; no veil can shield his mystery. This brings us to another reservation: if God reveals himself wholly to man, and this revelation cannot fail to take place in history, would it not perhaps coincide with history itself in a sort of Bacchic triumph of eternal recurrence that would cancel out the difference between God and man? (Forte 1995: 30). In this connection, Dubarle (1976) lists the alleged shortcomings of Hegel's view of Catholic theology: Hegelian philosophy, he claims, does not safeguard transcendence, does not make it possible to recognize the distinction between man's being and God's, and nullifies the religious meaning of revelation. The reading of Barth and other interpreters, while pointing at some difficulties of the text, does not allow to fully grasp the significance of Hegel's philosophy of religion.

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Philosophy without the ‘Meta’: Sensuous Practice and Theoretical Knowledge in Hegel’s Philosophy of Art

Paul A. Kottman

Introduction

To situate, or excuse, my contribution to this volume, let me begin by recalling a distinction, made by Aristotle, between two kinds of human excellence or perfection. I have in mind the distinction between (1) the ‘theoretical or contemplative life’ and (2) the practical or active life, the pursuit of moral or political virtue. For Aristotle, these two ways of life correspond to two basic types of knowledge: (1) the first is ‘theoretical’ knowledge of how things *are*, of reality; (2) the second includes ‘moral’ knowledge or ‘practical wisdom’ of good and evil, the harmful and beneficial, the beautiful and the ugly.

In many world traditions from ancient China to the biblical tradition, the second type – ‘revealed-traditional wisdom’ or ‘moral-value knowledge’ – takes priority. In the Garden of Eden story from Genesis, for instance, Eve desires knowledge of good and evil, and only after ‘the fall’ does Eve learn about the nature of reality. As is well known, a distinctive feature of the philosophical tradition to which Aristotle belongs is the reversal of this priority of moral knowledge over theoretical knowledge. For Aristotle, moral knowledge (of what is good or bad for humans) results from intellectual activity, from the contemplation of the way things really are – not the other way around.

According to this tradition, human beings do not determine what is good or bad on the basis of divine revelation or transmitted ‘traditional wisdom’, but rather through our own rational effort – either by contemplating how things are (*nous*, theoretical reflection) or by practical judgement (*phronesis*), whereby we reflect on what constitutes a good action. If we are to live well or save ourselves from ruin, then it must be through our own sense-making efforts rather than in some *a priori* ‘moral knowledge’ that would govern or evaluate whatever we do.

It is often supposed that the modern philosophical tradition deepens the Aristotelian priority of theoretical over moral knowledge. It is common to describe

modern philosophy – since Bacon or Descartes – as being dominated by epistemology or theories of knowledge, in ways that make moral philosophy (or the philosophy of art or religion) somehow secondary. It is often said, too, that Kant (like Aristotle) sought to overcome the primacy of moral-traditional wisdom by suggesting that learning how to best act is a rational activity – and not the result of divinely revealed wisdom or a traditional ‘way of doing things’. According to this tradition, moral life is understood to be a manifestation of reason rather than a condition of possibility for any further reasoning. The ‘sociality of reason’ in Hegel, too, is routinely viewed as a radical extension of this tradition.

On the other hand, there have been many other philosophers who identify with – or who want to identify – a different tradition in Western philosophy whose aim, as Alexander Nehemas puts it, ‘is less to construct a theory of the world as it is to establish and articulate a mode of life’ (1998: 104). Nehemas has in mind thinkers such as the early Platonic Socrates, Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault. This ‘alternative’ tradition – which could include many other figures from Augustine, to the French *moralistes*, to Rousseau or Schopenhauer or Emerson – is sometimes put forth in a kind of opposition to the sort of high-theorizing often attributed, especially, to modern philosophers from Descartes to Hegel. Think of Nietzsche’s description of Hegel and Schopenhauer in *Beyond Good and Evil* as ‘two hostile brother geniuses in philosophy who strove apart toward opposite poles of the German spirit and in the process wronged each other as only brothers wrong each other’ (Nietzsche 1989: §252, 189).

The reception of Hegel over the past century or so – if not Hegel’s writings themselves – attest to the persistence of this division between ‘theoretical’ and ‘moral-practical philosophy’ within modern philosophy. Not only have Hegel’s writings on religion and art received much less attention amongst ‘Hegelians’ than, say, the shapes of consciousness discussed in the first parts of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – but it can also seem, to most academic philosophers, philosophically suspect to go looking in Hegel’s philosophy of art or religion for clues to Hegel’s overall thinking *about* philosophy, or for something like Hegel’s ‘metaphilosophy’.

In the face of all this, I want to take as my point of departure the following working supposition: Hegel’s remarks on art do not so much reverse the hierarchy according to which theoretical philosophy determines moral philosophy, as they refuse or deny any ‘metaphilosophical’ division of philosophy into these two branches.

Even further, I want to deny that Hegel operates with a distinction between philosophy and metaphilosophy, or a ‘philosophy of philosophy’. Wherever Hegel talks *about* philosophy – for instance, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, or when he speaks of philosophy as a dimension (alongside art and religion) of absolute *Geist* – he is, I think, just *doing* philosophy, enacting philosophy, not just talking about doing it or talking about what it would be to do it.¹

This is further cause for interrogating Hegel’s enactment of the co-implication of theoretical and practical activity. Hegel’s *Lectures on Fine Art* are a propitious site for such an interrogation.

Lectures on Fine Art

Although I will focus especially on Hegel's remarks on Christian painting, let me justify this interrogation – and begin to explain the way in which I want to explore its implications – by recalling some of Hegel's opening remarks on art in general.

In the opening pages of the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel emphasizes that 'the universal and absolute need from which art (on its formal side) springs has its origins in the fact that man is a thinking consciousness', namely that 'human beings make out of and for ourselves, what we are and whatever is [*was er ist und was überhaupt ist, aus sich selbst für sich macht*]' (LA, 30–31; translation modified). In this sense, 'human beings as spirit double themselves [*der Mensch als Geist verdoppelt sich*]', since we not only 'are' as things in nature are but we also see ourselves, represent ourselves to ourselves and, 'on the strength of this active placing' of ourselves before ourselves, we are *Geist*.

We accomplish this self-awareness, Hegel says, 'in a two-fold way: *first, theoretically*' insofar as we bring ourselves into our own consciousness, 'along with whatever moves, stirs, and presses in the human breast'. This self-representing, which Hegel also characterizes as 'thinking', is not a cold intellection but also something felt, an affective inwardness. Second, human beings do this by 'practical activity' – which Hegel says arises from the 'impulse' to 'produce' ourselves externally in whatever is directly given to us and to recognize ourselves therein. This practical activity is undertaken, says Hegel, to 'strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness' such that 'we enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization' of ourselves (LA, 31). In short, art-making itself manifests both theoretical (*felt*, affective) and practical (something done) activity, such that a (philosophical) account of art-making cannot refuse or privilege either the theoretical or the practical at any 'metaphilosophical' level.

On the other hand, with respect to the experience of art (as distinct from the making of art), Hegel locates our interest in art as *neither* the 'practical interest of desire' – which 'converts [the object] to its own use by destroying it' – *nor* the 'theoretical consideration by scientific intelligence' since art 'cherishes an interest in the object in its individual existence and does not struggle to change it into its universal thought and concept' (LA, 38). For – writes Hegel – 'in the sensuous aspect of a work of art the spirit seeks neither the concrete material stuff, the empirical inner completeness and development of the organism which desire demands, nor the universal and purely ideal thought'. By this, Hegel seems to want to get at what he calls 'the *middle* between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought ... *not yet* pure thought, but, despite its sensuousness *no longer* a purely material existence either, like stones, plants and organic life ... something ideal, but which, not being ideal as thought is ideal, is still at the same time there externally as a thing' (LA, 38).

In sum, if art-making entails both theoretical and practical activity, then our interest in, or experience of, art likewise involves both the theoretical ('universal thought and concept') and the practical (concrete material stuff capable of arousing a desiring interest). 'Consequently', writes Hegel, 'the sensuous aspect of art is related only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing, while smell, taste and touch

remain excluded from the enjoyment of art [*Deshalb bezieht sich das Sinnliche der Kunst nur auf die beiden theoretischen Sinne des Gesichts und Gehörs, während Geruch, Geschmack und Gefühl vom Kunstgenuss ausgeschlossen bleiben*] (LA, 38).

The conclusion Hegel draws, that is, from the 'middle-ness' of art with respect to the theoretical and the practical, sensuous concreteness and universal/purely ideal thought, is that art's between-ness is restricted to what Hegel calls the 'theoretical senses of sight and hearing,' to the exclusion of smell, taste and touch.

Smell, taste and touch

According to the 1828–1829 Heimann version of Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel holds that only seeing and hearing are 'theoretical' senses – touch (*Tastsinn, Gefühl*), taste and smell are not theoretical, but rather practical. That is, Hegel seems (in Heimann's version) to delineate a contrast between *theoretische Sinne* and *praktische Sinne*; seeing and hearing are theoretical, whereas smell, touch and taste are practical. Art deals with seeing and hearing, on this account, because art is for our theoretical interest and because art thus relies upon a prior division between the theoretical and the practical senses.

This may well be Hegel's view. In the pages that follow, I will not try to persuade anyone otherwise. But if it is Hegel's true view, then so much the worse for Hegel.

For it seems to me that Hegel's remarks – in the Hotho version of the *Lectures* – on the exclusion of touch, taste and smell from the purview of fine art offer unique resources for a critique of our contemporary visual culture and its obliviousness to the moral and theoretical implications of how human beings are touched or touch one another. However, the worth of those resources will depend on reading Hegel's views on the relation of seeing to touch in the *Lectures on Fine Art* differently from what the Heimann text would indicate. While I will not try to dissuade anyone from thinking the Heimann version is legitimate, I do want to begin by offering reasons for reading the Hotho version as pointing us in a more fruitful direction for thinking further about the issues Hegel raises.

In Hotho's version, art's reliance on seeing and hearing, as articulated in this passage, does not license us to conclude that only seeing and hearing are 'theoretical' senses. The issue, for Hegel, is not that touch, taste and smell are insufficiently theoretical (*too* immersed in the 'practical', so to speak), but rather that 'these senses cannot have to do with artistic objects'. Since touch, taste and smell deal with 'matter as such and its immediately sensible qualities', they 'cannot have to do with artistic objects, which are meant to maintain themselves in their real independence and allow of no *purely* sensuous relationship' (LA, 39).

The important contrast between the senses, therefore, is not pursuant to a division between 'theoretical' senses and 'practical' senses; (Hotho's) Hegel does not invoke a division between the 'sensuous' and the 'intellectual'. As (Hotho's) Hegel repeatedly emphasizes, art's theoretical claims are also sensuous claims; and anyway, the 'theoretical' senses of seeing and hearing, too, are of course themselves entirely sensuous. The important contrast, instead, concerns the way in which art – *das*

Sinnliche der Kunst – entails the exclusion of touch, taste and smell ('smell, taste and touch remain excluded from the enjoyment of art') (LA, 38).

As it is a perennial – even constitutive – temptation of philosophy (especially of theoretical philosophy) to privilege the 'scientific' dimensions of seeing (especially) and hearing over the other senses, it can be tempting to read Hegel as grounding our interest in art in the theoretical superiority of seeing and hearing. Nevertheless, it is crucial to Hegel's argument here that it is *art* that divides seeing and hearing from smell, touch and taste – since art includes the former and excludes the latter. Art, that is, does not just rely on a division between the five senses along theoretical lines (theoretical versus practical, or theoretical versus sensuous). Rather, art is a site at which the theoretical dimension of seeing and hearing is given its proper due, and *therefore* a site for understanding what is 'theoretical' about all of our five senses.

For a start, if art cannot include – cannot make beautiful or enjoyable – taste, touch and smell, then this is not because these senses are untheoretical or somehow inherently less theoretical than seeing or hearing, but because art cannot make use of, or make adequately intelligible, whatever is theoretical about smell, taste and touch. Art can make use only of the theoretical senses of sight and sound, since artistic objects 'are meant to maintain themselves in their real independence and allow of no *purely* sensuous relationships' (LA, 39). Again, I understand this to mean, not that touch, taste and smell are *purely* sensuous in the sense of being *merely* sensuous, or somehow *untheoretical* – but rather than they are sensuous in ways that, as Hegel indicates, do not lend themselves to the making of art objects that 'maintain themselves in the real independence'.

For smell, taste and touch have to do with matter as such and its immediately sensible qualities – smell with material volatility in air, taste with the material liquefaction of objects, touch with warmth, cold and smoothness etc. For this reason, these senses cannot have to do with artistic objects.

(LA, 39)

This means that art's use of the theoretical senses of sight and sound *does* in fact teach us something about the theoretical dimension of smell, taste and touch – namely, that the latter are related to art by their exclusion, an 'exclusion' that is vouchsafed by the way in which these senses cannot 'maintain themselves in their real independence [or]' by the making of art objects.

In short – it might *seem* that whatever theoretical dimension there is to touch, taste or smell cannot be revealed in our contemplation of art objects. But I think Hegel's conclusion points in the opposite direction. The exclusion of touch, taste and smell from art objects – that is, the importance or meaning of that exclusion – is revealed *in* the exclusivity of art's relation to the theoretical senses of seeing and hearing. In this way, the exclusivity of art's relation to seeing and hearing teaches us something about the relationship between seeing and hearing, on the one hand, and touch, taste and smell, on the other – something that art, exclusively, teaches.

Moreover, what art teaches about taste, touch and smell – by excluding them, in favour of sight and smell – points, precisely, to something about the *theoretical*

dimensions of taste, touch and smell. After all, the sensuousness of taste, touch and smell is self-evident – we do not require art objects to know that touch, taste and smell are sensuous. But we do need art to see what is theoretical about touching, tasting or smelling; indeed, the mutually exclusive relation between touch, taste and smell – and art's relation to seeing and hearing – teaches us about *that*. If fine art is, as Hegel says, the 'sensuous apprehension of the Absolute', then it must concern all five senses – the Absolute apprehended in touch, say – even though, or precisely because, art's beauty concerns only seeing and hearing.²

Seeing and hearing

All of this is, admittedly, still very general. To lend these considerations more concreteness, I will leave aside taste, smell and hearing, and focus instead on seeing and touch. More precisely, I want to consider Hegel's remarks on painting – the art form in which the theoretical sense of seeing is most thoroughly developed. Even more precisely, I want to consider Hegel's remarks on Christian painting, especially Hegel's rather astonishing claim that maternal love is the proper content of Christian painting, of painting in general.

As in Hegel's account of fine art overall, so too his account of painting turns on the issue of the appropriateness of artistic form to ideational content. A crucial question, therefore, concerns the relation between the form of painting – above all, painting's solicitation of a certain kind of looking or beholding which could be called 'devotional' or 'highly attentive and deeply interested' beholding, but which is nonetheless neither merely entertaining nor appetitive nor scientific – and the content that is thus beheld.

This raises several questions: What *content* is fit to be beheld such that what it is gets apprehended by being beheld *thusly*? What calls *just to be looked at*, attended to in *that* way? How does the answer to that question bear – as it must, in Hegel's view, given the ambitions he pins upon his 'science of art' – on broader questions concerning the intelligibility of the world and ourselves?

Of course, almost anything can be looked at. But most things that can be looked at *also* call to be touched, or picked up, or tasted, or smelled, or listened to, or regarded warily, or rolled around in and so forth. So, lots of narrowing down is going to be required, if we are to get a sense for the kind of 'appropriateness' of form to content that Hegel has in mind when it comes to painting. For a start, we need to grasp what is not only essentially *seeable* but above all *beholdable*; that is, capable of sustaining (and needful of) devoted looking – but without also inspiring or soliciting some other sensuous engagement, like eating or grabbing or caressing and so forth.

A very general, but nevertheless helpful, answer to the question of what is made by humans to be looked at, just to be beheld, adheres, as Plato had already intuited, in the very *form* of image-making, understood as a 'mirroring' of reality on two-dimensional surfaces such as walls or canvas.³ Human-made images inspire beholding – rather than other forms of engagement (appetitive, auditory, tactile) – just as soon as we grasp that we are looking at the appearance of something and not at the thing itself. The sight of a real banana might inspire me to grab it or eat it; but my appetite is deflected as soon

as I understand that I am looking at an image of a banana and not at a real banana. Being in a 'real' pastoral landscape might inspire me to unfurl my picnic blanket, just as the sight of a stormy sky might cause me to take cover; but paintings of such scenes – whether Chinese landscapes or Hudson River School paintings – deflect such responses and call only for my looking. Which is, again, just to say, human-made images in all their variety provide an initial answer to the question posed above (What can sustain devoted looking – without also inspiring or soliciting some other sensuous engagement, like eating or grabbing or caressing and so forth?). *Any* painting – just because it is a humanly-made image – is in principle capable of sustaining our devoted looking.

However, this only an insight about the formal property of human-made images. Or to put it with Plato, this gives rise to the worry that human-made images are *merely* 'formal' presentations, dim adumbrations of reality.⁴ If image-making is *the only* answer to the question of what can sustain our devoted looking – that is, if the only answer to this question lies in a certain *form* of human productivity or *poiesis* – then the issue remains merely formal or technical or 'aesthetic'. Hegel makes this point at the very beginning of his remarks on painting:

It can occur at once to any critic that not only in Greece and Rome were there excellent painters ... but that other peoples too, the Chinese, the Indians, the Egyptians acquired fame on the score of their paintings. Of course, owing to the variety of subjects it adopts and the manner in which it can portray them, painting is less restricted than sculpture in the range of its spread amongst different peoples. But this is not the point really at issue ... The deeper question is about the *principle* of painting, i.e., to examine its means of portrayal, and *therefore to determine what that subject-matter is which by its very nature so precisely harmonizes with the form and mode of portrayal employed by painting that this form corresponds exactly with its content.*

(LA, 799; my emphasis)

On the basis of a merely formal account, Hegel is saying, we still do not know what the aesthetic achievement of painting (or image-making) is *for* – what 'subject-matter' that form of production makes intelligible. Elsewhere, I have argued that we can consider image-making as the achievement of a heightened awareness of our ways of noticing reality in general. Image-making provides the necessary contrast between being guided by the world and being guided by something else (our imaginative 'free association', perhaps). Image-making is thus *also* one way we teach ourselves what is real.⁵ In the *Poetics*, Aristotle had already offered a version of this claim, when he noted that the pleasure taken in 'seeing likenesses' is not only the enjoyment of technique or colour but also the intellectual pleasure of *learning* – which occurs when we 'see' that a likeness is a depiction of 'such and such'.⁶

Hegel, however, wants to raise the question of painting to a different level of abstraction. For Hegel, the spiritual 'need' (*Notwendigkeit*) to which painting responds is connected to another enormous question – what is *looking* for? That is, to understand the fine art of painting, we need to answer something like the following question: what is the *geistige* need for this devotional form of beholding?

In the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, in his 'anthropological' discussion of sight, Hegel offers a preliminary answer to this question when he remarks that, in seeing:

we relate ourselves to things merely theoretically as it were, and not yet practically; for when we see things we leave them alone as a subsistent being and merely relate ourselves to that aspect of them which is of an ideal nature. It is on account of sight's being thus independent of corporeality proper, that it may be said to be the noblest of the senses.

(PSS II, 169)

In the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel links this anthropological dimension of seeing in general – namely, its affordance of a 'merely theoretical' relation to things – to the spiritual need for art in general, since 'the sensuous aspect of art is related only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing' (LA, 38). Hegel does so by trying to determine precisely the kind of looking with 'theoretical interest' that adheres in the realm of art.

It is useful to recall the basic points Hegel makes in this regard. First, Hegel distinguishes the spiritual need for beholding under discussion here from what he calls 'the poorest mode of apprehension, the least adequate to spirit' – namely, 'merely looking on, hearing, feeling, etc., just as in hours of spiritual fatigue (indeed for many people at any time) it may be an amusement to wander about without thinking, just to listen here and look round there, and so on' (LA, 36). Hegel's point, I take it, is that one common mode of looking upon the world is characterized by a kind of relaxed interest (or 'amusement') – at such times, whatever is perceived is not felt to be deep interest for the 'inner being' of the perceiver. Unlike Kant, there seems to be no place for 'disinterestedness' in Hegel's account of perceptual experience. Instead, Hegel notes a kind of spiritually fatigued, merely amused interest, in which the perceiver is neither gripped by, nor really grasping, the external world.

Second, Hegel notes that another mode of 'sensuous apprehension' is 'desire' – whereby *Geist* makes the external world 'into an object for its inner being' and is 'driven, once again in the form of sensuousness, to realize itself in things ... to cancel this independence and freedom of external things, and to show that they are only there to be destroyed and consumed' (LA, 36). At such times, 'the person' who desires is 'caught up in the individual, restricted and negatory interests of his desires' – he is gripped by 'external things and related to them' and, thus, 'neither free in himself ... nor free in respect of the external world' (LA, 36). Desirousness is a mode of sensuous-spiritual existence in which both subject and object are unfree, since they are bound and determined by the interests of desire. Such unfreedom (the interest of desire) is not *opposed* to *Geist* – the unfreedom of desire is not *Geistlos*; rather, it is a spiritual neediness in contrast to which the significance of 'freer' relations manifest themselves. As Hegel puts it, 'this relation of desire is not the one in which man stands to the work of art ... he relates himself to [the artwork] without desire, as to an object which is for the contemplative side of spirit alone' (LA, 36–37). Desirous looking would lean towards, imply a further desire for, touching or tasting or smelling – whereas the work of art solicits contemplation, non-appetitive devotion.

Here, Hegel offers an important twist to a point already made above. If our appetite for bananas is deflected by the perception that we are confronted by a mere appearance or image of a banana, then this is not – as Aristotle held – because we perceive the 'mimetic' quality of the image, but rather because 'with mere pictures ... desire is not served' (LA, 36). Indeed, only when desire is not served can the 'contemplative side of spirit' (including what Aristotle characterized as the 'intellectual satisfaction' of seeing images *as* depictions of 'such-and-such') ever come into its own. Moreover, where Aristotle wanted to hold onto desire – albeit in the non-appetitive form of the 'desire to understand' that adheres in contemplation, and which explains the special delight we take in the sense of sight – Hegel will speak of 'purely spiritual interests' or needs whose satisfaction demands the exclusion of 'all desire.'⁷ Indeed, on this very point, Hegel makes a sweeping claim that will be of great important for the present discussion.

The work of art, though it has sensuous existence, does not require in this respect a sensuously concrete being and a natural life; indeed it ought not to remain on this level, seeing that it is meant to satisfy purely spiritual interests and exclude all desire from itself.

(LA, 37)

Amongst other things, therefore, we will need to determine what on earth can satisfy 'purely spiritual interests' and why such satisfaction demands the exclusion of bonds of desire – *including* the Aristotelian 'desire to understand' – as well as what art teaches about our need for *this* kind of spiritual satisfaction. More on this as we go along.

Third, Hegel notes how the kind of seeing that 'lets individual things alone' – thus, again, in contrast to both 'amused' onlooking and practical desire – involves what he calls 'the purely theoretical relation to *intelligence*' (LA, 37). Think of this as Hegel's twist on the Aristotelian view, just cited, which links the delight of seeing to the desire to understand.

The theoretical study of things is not interested in consuming them in their individuality and satisfying itself and maintaining itself sensuously by means of them, but in coming to know them in their *universality*, finding their inner essence and law, and conceiving them in accordance with their Concept.

(LA, 37)

This is 'the work of science,' in which 'intelligence goes straight for the universal, the law, the thought and concept of the object' (LA, 37). What distinguishes this scientific (rational intelligence) relation to the external world from amusement or desire is the way in which it relates human beings to things 'in accordance with universality' – the universality of the intelligence in its universal relation to the universality of the intelligible. Science, that is, not only turns its back on the immediate individuality of the object but also 'transforms [the object] from within; out of something sensuously concrete it makes an abstraction, something thought, and so something essentially other than what that same object was in its sensuous appearance' (LA, 37). This has

bearing on what Hegel says about portraiture in painting as the apprehension of an individual; in contrast to the scientific ambitions of Freudian psychoanalysis, Hegel's philosophy considers the apprehension of the individual as fundamentally unscientific – indeed, as one way of distinguishing the need for art from the need for scientific apprehension.

Lastly, 'Artistic interest' – to finally turn to our topic – distinguishes itself from the work of science, as well as from amusement and desirousness, by virtue of the *kind* of perception entailed in the making and the perceiving of artworks:

1. Unlike mere amusement, fine art reveals and articulates the intense interests (the *highest* interests) that relate subjects and objects.
2. In contrast to desirousness, fine art manifests these highest interests in ways that 'lets the object' persist freely and on its own account – and thus show how the grip by which art-makers and art-perceivers are held entails a kind of demand that some things in the world freely persist on their own account. (What *kind* of demand? More on this in a moment.)
3. Unlike science, art 'cherishes an interest in the object and its individual existence and does not struggle to change it into its universal thought and concept' (LA, 38).

Artistic interest

These three conditions bear in a special way on the art of painting, insofar as painting 'opens the way for the first time to the principle of finite and inherently infinite subjectivity, the principle of our own life and existence, and in paintings we see what is effective and active in ourselves' (LA, 797). It is difficult to state Hegel's views on painting economically. But the first thing to be said is that, for Hegel, Christian painting makes visible (makes 'shine') the liveliness of subjectivity as self-relatedness, or 'inwardness' (*volle Innigkeit*). Christian painting does this, moreover, by showing something of general-universal significance in its portrayal of concrete, particular self-conscious, inwardly self-related human beings. For Hegel, Christian paintings attract our gaze such that we learn something about our own subjectivity; in looking at portrayals of particular human beings posed in particular ways, as well as landscapes or still lifes, we learn something about ourselves as self-consciously self-related.⁸

Second, painting makes human self-consciousness *affectively*, compellingly visible – in a 'lively' way. That is, minimally, Christian paintings are not mere illustrations of narrative episodes that can be called to mind whether or not they are sensuously apprehended, as if pictorial illustration merely aided such calling to mind. Christian paintings assume no separation between the affective and the theoretical or what is 'called to mind': whatever is theoretically grasped is grasped affectively by the beholder. There is a kind of analogy in Hegel between the relation between an artwork and beholder and a relationship between people – as if the claim made on beholders by artworks were somehow like the claim made by another person, or even just by the presence of another person.

Third, what is sensuously grasped – the subject matter or content – is self-related subjectivity or, more broadly, the human heart, feeling, *Innigkeit*. Hegel specifies that this self-related subjectivity must result from a withdrawal from external suffering into self-repose. That is, this self-relation appears most fully where a human being overcomes not some external obstacle but some *internal* struggle, such as one's own hard-heartedness.⁹ Hegel calls this achieved self-relation 'bliss' – as distinct from 'happiness' or 'good fortune', since it also entails broken-heartedness or the shattering of hard-heartedness.

Hegel also refers to this bliss as 'religion alone' – 'the peace of the individual who has a sense of himself but finds true satisfaction only when, self-collected, his mundane heart is broken so that he is raised above his mere natural existence and its finitude, and in this elevation has won a universal depth of feeling' (LA, 816). Hegel offers several examples of what he means, including a treatment of Correggio's Mary Magdalene that would be worth a separate discussion.

However – and the thesis is so astonishing that it has yet to receive the commentary it deserves – the paradigm of such painterly bliss for Hegel is the religious love, the passionless love, of Mary for her son, Christ:

As the most perfect subject for painting, I have already specified the [blissful] love, the object of which is not a purely spiritual 'beyond' but is present, so that we can see love itself before us in what is loved. The supreme and unique form of this love is Mary's love for the Christ-child ... the most beautiful subject to which Christian art in general, and especially painting in its religious sphere has risen.

(LA, 824)

For Hegel, religious or passionless (*leidenschaftslos*) love is the true, ideal subject matter of painting. We could, I think, call it the ideal of parental love, which is what Hegel sees validated in Christian religion too; namely, in its inversion whereby the privileged adoration of a transcendent God by his 'children' is superseded by the adoration of a concrete, imminent child by his mother.¹⁰ Hegel sees this realized in the history of painting, as Christian painting overcomes the iconoclasm according to which the divine (as transcendent) cannot be represented pictorially, in favour of *seeing*, and being affected by seeing, the divine as 'love reconciled and at peace with itself ... above all as the Madonna's love for her child, as the absolutely suitable ideal subject for this sphere' (LA, 819).

We can begin to see what Hegel means, I think, by considering a few paintings.

In Figure 11.1, the Christ 'child' is presented as a little 'man' held forth by his mother in a regal position – such that her relation to him is shown as the bearing of this social-familial legitimacy. Mary's eyes look to the side but not at her child – as if indicating the presence of a power 'out of the frame' that mediates her relation to her child, as well as their overall relation to the viewer. In Figure 11.2, Mary's eyes still look to the side, but because she faces the child – who playfully lifts her veil, in what seems an effort to see his mother's eyes and regard her expression – our attention falls on how mother and child see each other, rather than primarily on how they position themselves for our viewing. We see Christ looking at his mother, as if *searching for her gaze*, perhaps



Figure 11.1 *Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George*, sixth or early seventh century, encaustic on wood, 2' 3" × 1' 7 3/8". Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. Public Domain.

seeing if she will regard *him*. The form of our looking thus meets with the 'content' of a searching gaze *in* the painting. Figure 11.3, Hegel suggests (when he singles out Da Vinci and Raphael for praise), shows Mary with 'her eye on her child' (LA, 830) – such that her devoted regard for her child, mirrored in Saint Anne's regard for her daughter (Mary) regarding her child, meets the devotion of our own regard for the painting.



Figure 11.2 Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1300. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Public Domain.

Painting, that is, achieves the presentation of the 'divine' as imminent passionless regard for a child rather than the iconoclastic (non-artistic) adoration of a Divine-transcendent beyond. Gazing devotedly *is* an expression of maternal love, as well as the achievement of a kind of self-relation (in the gazer) – who is able to regard the child (and, analogously, the painting) as a free-standing and independent reality. The inward self-relatedness of Mary, in other words, is presented not only in portraits



Figure 11.3 Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, 1503. Louvre, Paris. Public Domain.

of her on her own (as in say, Rembrandt's or Velazquez's manner of individual portraiture) – but in the depiction of her looking at her child, especially in Italian painting.¹¹ Moreover, this painterly presentation is not just a mirroring illustration of a practice (of parental love) that already lies outside painting. Rather, the paintings are a matrix for understanding, and hence intervene in, the reality of the love that they depict. Think of how parents often produce and gaze upon photographs or images of

their children, not as mere representations to be dispassionately studied, but with a devotion that is dialectically entwined with the practical forms that devotion to children takes.

It is important to note the extra-artistic, ethical stakes of this. As Hegel points out elsewhere, love as 'mutual subjectivity' cannot flourish in modernity unless parents love their children more than children love their parents.¹² Perhaps it is helpful here to note, too, that artists often regard their works as their 'children' – and that painting is often figured as a kind of 'giving birth' or 'labour of love'. These metaphors – for they cannot be literally true (to destroy an artwork may be a travesty, but it is not a murder) – might be taken as a clue to grasping the way in which paintings can demand a form of attentiveness that is significantly akin to the attentiveness required for the devotional love of children, in the sense that beholding fine paintings entails the attribution of an absolute value and passionless devotion to what is beheld. *Lovingly* passionless, not merely disinterested (in Kant's sense) – without the expectation that the love be 'returned' in kind from the artwork (or the child). This, I take it, is also part of Hegel's critique of the role that disinterestedness plays in Kant's account of aesthetic judgement.

I asked earlier: What *content* is fit to be beheld such that what it is gets apprehended by being beheld *thusly*? What calls *just to be looked at*, attended to in *that way*? How does the answer to that question bear – as it must, in Hegel's view, given the ambitions he pins upon his 'science of art' – on broader questions concerning the intelligibility of the world and ourselves. We now have Hegel's answer: maternal love, 'the object of which is not a purely spiritual beyond but which is present so that we can see love itself before us in what is loved' (LA, 824).

As noted, Hegel emphasizes that he admires, above all, those works in which Mary 'is portrayed in her present love and bliss as she has her eye on her child' (LA, 830). The art form of painting – in which what calls only for our looking, but not for our touching, is presented as an independent reality to be grasped (theoretically) in our gaze alone – thus meets its proper content, namely an actual form of (parental) love or devotion which is not appetitive, and which manifests itself for Hegel especially as act of looking: Mary's devoted gaze as depicted especially the masters of the Italian Renaissance.

Let this reconstruction of Hegel's account of maternal love in Christian painting serve to support at least the following conclusions.

First, the spiritual need for looking (for *just* looking) – to which the art of Christian painting is the most adequate response, according to Hegel – concerns not only the theoretical power of seeing in general (for instance, its connection our appetite or our scientific inquiry) but above all the way in which the theoretical power of seeing makes intelligible or apprehensible the free self-related subject: Mary. Second, the self-related subject – Mary – is made apprehensible by the art of painting, by the theoretical deliverances of that practice, with its exclusive artistic focus on seeing: self-related subjectivity would not be thus apprehensible without the art of painting, without fine art. Third, the art of painting achieves this most fully in the apprehension of the practice of maternal love – since, again, Mary's self-relatedness is apprehended in our beholding of her relation to her child; or (to put the point from the perspective of

Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*) in our apprehension of what the centuries-long tradition of portraying Mary was able to render intelligible about maternal love, over time.

The theoretical-practical-moral stakes

With these conclusions, we are in a position to return to the questions I posed at the outset, concerning the relationship between seeing and touching, and the theoretical-practical-moral stakes of this connection.

One implication of Hegel's discussion of Mary in Christian painting is that there is a practical aspect to the 'maternal' achievement of her self-relatedness: namely, her own apprehension of the independent reality of her child. As we have seen, Hegel claims that this practical aspect concerns the way in which Mary *looks* at her child – not the way that she *touches* him. From a common-sense point of view, this can seem odd; is it even possible to love a child without touching him? Does not the practice of maternal love and care require touching as well as looking? Do not the paintings themselves depict precisely that – I mean, Mary holding or caressing her child?

Hopefully, our discussion thus far can serve to clarify at least part of Hegel's reasons for emphasizing Mary's gaze, rather than her touch of her child: the formal demands of fine art exclude touch and privilege the theoretical dimension of seeing. Since, for Hegel, form must entail content, the *beheld* apprehension of Mary's self-relatedness is achievable only in our seeing *her* beholding her child's independent being.

There is, so to speak, a wrong or impoverished or diminished or inadequate way for Mary to behold her son – a way of beholding that would miss or fail to adequately grasp her child's independence, and hence a way in which her *own* self-relatedness would be diminished or stunted or inadequately felt by her. Again, Hegel thinks that this is what the history of Christian painting manifests – as it develops from, say, the *Theotokos* (Figure 11.1) to the Da Vinci (Figure 11.3). But this is *not* because there just 'is' a 'right way' to look at one's child – one to which early Christian painters were somehow blind and to which Da Vinci or Raphael were not blind, and hence finally brought to the canvas. Nothing in Hegel's philosophy of art suggests that he regards the history of art as a series of representations of perennial truths. Instead, the 'rightness' of Mary's maternal gaze with respect to what she gazes upon, namely her free, independent and loved son – the ethical rightness of her gaze – must be seen by us to be precisely as 'right' as the fitness of art's theoretical reliance on seeing to its own achievement of that which this 'theoretical' power of sight makes most urgently intelligible: self-related subjectivity, maternal love.

This is elusive, to say the least. At stake is the way in which our long self-education through the practice of art-making, over time, has entailed a theoretical apprehension which is vouchsafed by its moral-practical implications. After all, at issue is the treatment of a child – of *children* as independent and free-standing – and the corresponding self-relatedness or 'bliss' of human subjects in general, starting with Mary. The ethical stakes are embedded *in* the development of theoretical power of seeing, a theoretical power that it is art's special and exclusive task to apprehend as part of its practice.

I am trying to bring into view ways in which following Hegel's reflections on Christian painting force us to explode the boundaries between theoretical and moral philosophy. The stakes, I am suggesting, are as high as can be – theoretically and ethically, which must be what we mean when we say that, 'philosophically', the stakes are high.

Touching and exposure

In a book which scandalized art historians when it first appeared, Leo Steinberg observed:

The first necessity is to admit a long-suppressed matter of fact: that Renaissance art, both north and south of the Alps, produced a large body of devotional imagery in which the genitalia of the Christ Child ... receive such demonstrative evidence that one must recognize an *ostentatio genitalium* comparable to the canonic *ostentatio vulnerum* ... the ostentive unveiling of the Child's sex, or the touching, protecting or presentation of it.

(Steinberg 1983: 3)

The 'scandal' of Steinberg's extraordinarily well-documented observations, of course, goes to the heart of the issues I am raising here: namely, the way which the devotional looking to which the art of painting calls us necessarily excludes touch.

In saying this, I do not mean merely to repeat Steinberg's observation – *Look! There is touching depicted in these paintings!* I mean to say, instead, that our inattention or 'obliviousness' (Steinberg's word) to the *significance* of the touching, or to the significance of the exposure of the Child's genitals, is enabled not just by critical inattention but by the *form* of painting itself. Because the form of painting does not call *for* touch, or to be touched – and, in fact, calls *not* to be touched, *noli tangere* – the 'obliviousness' to the significance of touching and exposed genitalia is not only an 'obliviousness' on the part of the beholder: it is essential to the development of the art of painting itself.

A reader of Steinberg might wish to accuse Hegel, too, of obliviousness. After all, Hegel never once mentions the touching or the exposure of the Child in Christian art. Hegel's focus, as we have seen, is on Mary's gaze. Hegel praises Italian art, and Bellini in particular. So, how could Hegel have missed the significance of the exposure and touching on display in Bellini's *Madonna and Child* (Figure 11.4) or in Jan van Hermessen's *The Virgin and Child* (Figure 11.5)? (Then again, one might also want to know how Steinberg could have forgotten Hegel, whom he never mentions in his book).

However, if my discussion at the outset was not misguided, then such an accusation is unfair to Hegel. The exclusion of touch from the art form of painting, on which Hegel insists, means that the theoretical-ethical-practical significance of how we touch each other cannot be adequately apprehended by the art of painting, or indeed by art *überhaupt*. I cite, again, the passage from Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, which serves as



Figure 11.4 Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, 1470. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara. Public Domain.

epigraph to the present chapter: 'the sensuous aspect of art is related only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing, while smell, taste and touch remain excluded from the enjoyment of art'.

The significance of touching and exposure on display in the Christian paintings adumbrated by Steinberg is not adequately apprehensible in the form of painting. Understanding the significance of the touching and exposure of the child, therefore,



Figure 11.5 Jan Sanders van Hermessen, *The Virgin and Child*, 1543. Madrid, Museo del Prado. Public Domain.

cannot just be a matter of looking harder or longer at the paintings – or of doing better art-historical exegesis armed with the right scholarship, as Steinberg supposes. Indeed, it is precisely *this* short-sighted view of art's significance against which Hegel wanted to guard. Indeed, Hegel guards against it when he excludes touch from the purview of art, in favour of the theoretical-moral dimension of seeing to which we have been attending.

At the outset, I said that the exclusion of touch, taste and smell from art objects – that is, the importance or meaning of that exclusion – is revealed *in* the exclusivity of art's relation to the theoretical senses of seeing and hearing. The exclusivity of art's relation to seeing and hearing, I said, teaches us something about the relationship between seeing and hearing, on the one hand, and touch, taste and smell, on the other – something that *only* art can teach. Moreover, what painting teaches about touch – by exclusion, in favour of sight – points, precisely, to the significance of the moral-theoretical dimensions of touching and being touched.

What this means is that – although the significance of touching and exposure on display in the Christian paintings is not adequately apprehensible in the form of painting – the *fact* of painting's inadequacy when it comes, precisely, to the apprehension of the theoretical significance of touching and exposure of children *is* on display.

When he speaks of art's exclusion of touching in favour of seeing, Hegel means – I think – to suggest precisely this: the theoretical significance of touching can only be limned by the manifest inadequacy of the theoretical power of seeing to grasp it. It is that inadequacy which is on display in Christian painting, in art's self-limitation to the sphere of the visual.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me recall Hegel's thesis on the persistent pastness of art's highest vocation. If it is part of art's highest vocation to have made sensuously apprehensible the highest concerns, the divine, then it is also part of art's self-limitation – of art's historical limitations – that this sensuous apprehension was or has been exclusively visual and aural.

Only when art's highest vocation starts to become a thing of the past can a chief significance of this exclusivity come into view: namely, the inadequacy of art and the visual sphere when it comes to grasping the moral-theoretical significance of touching and exposure, with respect to our highest concerns.

It is, I think, to Hegel's credit that he did not see in Christian paintings what Steinberg saw – namely, depictions of the 'meaning' of the touching of the Child. Hegel's view, as I understand it, is something like the contrary: Christian painting shows the significance of *withholding* touch – of *just* looking without touching – and it binds the significance of this exclusivity to our highest concerns, at a level at which the intelligibility of our independence and self-relatedness is at stake in how we see and touch one another.

Yet, I would have wanted more from Hegel.

For, I think it follows from this discussion – or, so I am trying to argue – that art not only excludes touch from its purview, and thus does not teach us the moral-theoretical significance of touching and being touched, but also, it follows, art *cannot* apprehend the moral-theoretical significance of touch. *That* itself is also crucial to what art teaches us about the moral-theoretical dimension of devotional looking, of looking without touching.

Art teaches us that art cannot – that *seeing without touching* cannot – teach us how and with what implications the highest concerns are morally-theoretically apprehensible in how we touch each other.

This self-limitation of art is part of the reason for its historical development, for its historical character, its pastness.

This can be stated the other way around, via a currently pressing question about the pornographication of our visual culture. If art – *qua* visual – were somehow able to teach us how and with what implications our highest concerns are morally-theoretically apprehended *in* how we touch each other, then what would that lesson *look* like?

Might it look like the paintings to which Steinberg draws out attention? As Steinberg never tires of reminding us, there are lots and lots of them. Thousands. But are there millions of such images? Who makes them, and for whom?

In September 2019, the *New York Times* reported that forty-five million images of children being sexually abused circulated online in the past year alone, more than double the previous year.¹³

What have we learned, what are we learning? What does the pornographication of visual culture mean, or augur? Is it the fate of visual art to force a non-artistic reckoning with its foundational obliviousness?

Notes

- 1 In writing this, I was put in mind of some remarks made by Stanley Cavell – remarks that, when I sought out Cavell's actual wording, turn out to make the very point that I am trying to make here. Cavell writes: 'If I deny a distinction, it is the still fashionable distinction between philosophy and meta-philosophy, the philosophy of philosophy. The remarks I make *about* philosophy (for example, about certain of its differences from other subjects) are, where accurate and useful, nothing more than philosophical remarks' (2002: xxxi).
- 2 Elsewhere, I have tried to show how 'touch' – more precisely, how we touch one another – is a sensuous apprehension of the Absolute. See Kottman (2017: 8 and *passim*).
- 3 Plato, *Republic* 596d-596e.
- 4 Plato, *Republic* 597a.
- 5 See Kottman (2019: 123–144).
- 6 Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b.
- 7 Aristotle connects the 'desire to understand' to the 'delight' taken in the senses, especially in the sense of sight. 'All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer sight to almost everything else. The reasons it that this, most of all the senses, makes us know (*eidenai*)' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1, 908a21–27).
- 8 Portraits of animals too. See Pippin (2018).
- 9 Not, like Hercules, 'dragons outside him or Lernean hydras' – that is – but rather 'the dragons and hydras of his own heart, the inner obstinacy and inflexibility of his own self' (LA, 816).

- 10 See LA, 816–827.
- 11 Mary is ‘not self-subsistent on her own account, but is perfect only in her child, in God, but in him she is satisfied and blessed, whether at the manger or as the Queen of Heaven, without passion or longing, without any further need, without any aim other than to have and to hold what she has’ (LA, 825).
- 12 ‘On the whole, children love their parents less than their parents love them’ (PR, §175 A, 213). (Quotes from the *Outlines of the Philosophy or Right* are from Knox’s translation). For more, see Kottman (2017: 168–169).
- 13 See Keller and Dance (2019).

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Hegel's Account of the Historicity of Philosophy

Christophe Bouton

How often one finds philosophers who think that they have developed ideas that are true and definitive, and so not at all limited by the epoch in which they were written. Not only are their ideas held to be entirely original but, as such, quite independent of what was thought in the past. Just to cite some famous examples: Descartes with his *cogito*, Kant with his *Critique*, Marx with his *historical materialism*, Frege with his *ideography*, Husserl with his *phenomenology*, Quine with his *physicalist ontology*, Wittgenstein with his *forms of life*, David Lewis with his *modal realism*. All these great philosophers, despite their differences, have this in common: they sought, or at least hoped to have established, truths that could not be improved upon, truths that were, in fact, improved upon, or at least were discussed and disputed, either partially or in their entirety, by other currents of thought. So it is that in each epoch we find new philosophies that criticize, refute or simply ignore previous philosophies. This paradox of an aspiration to definitive truth – which nevertheless ends up with only provisional knowledge – raises the question of the historicity of philosophy, from many points of view. What is the link between a philosophy and its epoch? Is this link irreducible? If so, then what is the point of trying to revive a past philosophy? What is the relation between a given philosophy and the philosophies that preceded it, which comes down to an examination of the history of philosophy? But can one ever philosophize on the basis of nothing, without even referring to the tradition that preceded it?

To better come to terms with these difficult questions, I am going to limit myself to Hegel, whose conception of philosophy is the subject of this collective volume. At first sight, it looks as though Hegel also fell for the temptation of definitive truth, with his idea of 'absolute knowledge' and his conception of philosophy as systematic science. But from another point of view, one can see that he tried to reconcile his absolute idealism with his own account of the historicity of philosophy in two complementary senses that are still relevant today; at least, that is the thesis I would like to defend in this chapter. In the first sense, which was later at the core of historicism, the historicity of philosophy designates the rooting of philosophical thoughts in the time to which they belong, but in the second sense, it means that each philosophy reaches right back into a history of philosophy extending over many centuries. Working out this double historicity is the central preoccupation of Hegel's introductions to his lectures

at Berlin devoted to the history of philosophy, lectures in which he examines the question of 'understanding how philosophy exhibits a development *in time* as well as having a history' (VGPE [1820], 29).¹ After specifying the semantics of the concept of historicity in Hegel, who probably invented the term 'historicity' (*Geschichtlichkeit*), I will remind the reader of the well-known preface to his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, according to which philosophy 'is its own time *apprehended in thoughts*' (PR, 15; GPR, GW14.1, 15).² I will then go on to show how Hegel worked out a specific way of reflecting on the history of philosophy, inspired in part by his philosophy of history, from which he carries over his concepts of 'event', 'development', 'acts', 'heroes' and so on, endeavouring to break with the manuals of his time on the history of philosophy. But unlike the philosophy of history, the history of philosophy has to deal with the relation between an acute awareness of the historicity of thoughts and a recognition of their eternal truth, and this in a way that will have to be clarified.

The invention of historicity

To my knowledge, it was Hegel who first coined the term 'Geschichtlichkeit' in the context of his history of philosophy. Moreover, this term was destined to enjoy a long historical posterity that remains alive even today. Schelling also employed this term, but a little after Hegel, or so it seems. The first appearance of the term in Schelling's corpus is to be found in a course on the history of philosophy, in his Munich Lectures, probably dating from 1836–1837. Schelling offers a retrospective interpretation of his philosophical trajectory, more particularly in connection with his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (published in 1800), understood as a 'transcendental history of the ego': 'So my very first steps in philosophy already exhibited a leaning toward historicity' (Schelling 1861: 94). In this passage, we find Schelling implicitly challenging Hegel for the authorship of the idea of historicity. But if this concept is certainly at the centre of his later 'positive philosophy' (philosophy of revelation and of mythology), it still only exists embryonically in his first writings. Hegel, on the contrary, does take account of the historicity of philosophy, starting out from his essay of 1801 on *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, when he insists that 'Dichotomy is the source of the need for philosophy' (DIFF., 89; DIFF., GW4, 12). This claim implies in fact that philosophy is rooted in the culture of an epoch, in its periods of crisis, to which it seeks to contribute ways of reconciling oppositions. But in this text, Hegel adopts the first sense of historicity, as rooted in an epoch, and not the second, whereby philosophy belongs to a centuries-old history:

But if the Absolute, like Reason which is its appearance, is eternally one and the same – as indeed it is – then every Reason that is directed toward itself and comes to recognize itself, produces a true philosophy and solves for itself the problem which, like its solution, is at all times the same. In philosophy, Reason comes to know itself and deals only with itself so that its whole work and activity are grounded in itself, and with respect to the inner essence of philosophy there are neither predecessors nor successors.

(DIFF., 87; DIFF., GW4, 10)³

In 1805–1806, we find Hegel adopting a different view. He gave his first course on the History of Philosophy (whose manuscript has been lost) at the University of Jena. In parallel, he sketched out, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the idea of historicity in both of the two senses. In the preface, he connects his project to raise philosophy to the status of a systematic science with the emergence of his own epoch, which he conceives as a ‘birth-time and a period of transition to a new era’ (PS, 6; PhG, GW9, 14).⁴ The attempt made by the individual to attain ‘absolute knowledge’, an attempt whose way, or whose ladder, is laid out in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, also assumes that the latter traverses the principal stages of the history of the world:

The individual, whose substance is the more advanced Spirit, runs through this past just as one who takes up a higher science goes through the preparatory studies he has long since absorbed, in order to bring their content to mind: he recalls them to the inward eye, but has no lasting interest in them. The single individual must also pass through the formative stages of universal Spirit so far as their content is concerned, but as shapes which Spirit has already left behind, as stages on a way that has been made level with toil. Thus, as far as factual information is concerned, we find that what, in former ages, engaged the attention of men of mature mind, has been reduced to the level of facts, exercises, and even games for children; and, in the child's progress through school, we shall recognize the history of the cultural development of the world traced out, as it were, in silhouette.

(PS, 16; PhG, GW9, 24–25)

So, even in the Jena period, one already finds, *in nuce*, both facets of the idea of the historicity of philosophy: the belonging of philosophy to its own historical epoch, which itself implies the need to gain access to philosophy by taking account of the tradition in which it is situated. Regarding the first aspect, Hegel comes up with a clearer formulation in the preface to his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* of 1820:

To comprehend *what is*, this is the task of philosophy, because *what is*, is reason. Whatever happens, every individual is a *child of his time*; so philosophy too is *its own time apprehended in thoughts*. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes. If his theory really goes beyond the world as it is and builds a world *as it ought to be*, that world exists indeed, but only in his opinions, a supple element in which anything you please may be constructed by the imagination.

(PR, 15; GPR, GW14.1, 15)

What does it mean to talk of apprehending, grasping, an epoch in thought? One can interpret this famous passage as saying that the philosopher has to surmount the negativity of time through the negativity of concepts, of thinking: ‘The important thing, then, is to recognize, in the semblance of the temporal and transient, the substance which is immanent, and the eternal which is present’ (PR, 14; GPR, GW14.1, 14). This interpretation, proposed by Max Winter (2016), who emphasizes the relation

of philosophy to eternity, stands explicitly opposed to that adopted by Frederick C. Beiser, who stresses the relation of philosophy to history: 'One of the most striking and characteristic features of Hegel's thought is that it historicizes philosophy, explaining its purpose, principles and problems in historical terms. Rather than seeing philosophy as a timeless, *a priori* reflection upon eternal forms, Hegel regards it as the self-consciousness of a specific culture, the articulation, defence, and criticism of its essential values and beliefs' (1993: 270). This idea of philosophy as the critical self-awareness of an epoch is not completely novel; it is to be found implicitly at work in Kant's essay of 1784: *Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?* A question Foucault, in his commentary on Kant, calls the 'critical ontology of ourselves' or 'the ontology of our actuality' (Foucault 1984).⁵ What is specific to Hegel is the tension between eternity and the historicity of philosophy, to which I will return in the last section. For the moment, I simply want to note that the historicity of philosophy, in the first sense, is also a limit, a chain which anchors it in the present and prevents it, according to Hegel, from going beyond its time, from indulging in prophetic declarations or utopias.

In what concerns the very term *Geschichtlichkeit*, one finds at least two occurrences of it in the corpus of Hegel's writings over the Berlin period. The first is to be found in Karl Ludwig Michelet's edition of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, which deals with the Greeks: 'In this character of free, beautiful historicity, of the Mnemosyne (that what they are is also with them (*bei ihnen*) as Mnemosyne), lies also the seed of free thinking, and so the character that philosophy originated with them' (VGP, W18, 175). Mnemosyne is for Hegel the goddess of memory. So this passage reminds us that historicity is founded in the interiorization of memory (*Erinnerung*), spirit's ability to preserve the past in the actuality of the present. Hegel replaces Kant's eternal reason with a concept of Spirit (*Geist*), which is essentially historical, in the sense that spirit holds, in the interiority of its present, the stages it has left behind. The second occurrence is also to be found in Michelet's edition, though this time the reference is to Christianity:

The essence of the Orthodox Fathers of the Church, who opposed these Gnostic speculations, is that they did grasp the determinate form of the objectivity in question, the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of Christ, but in such a way that this history is now also rooted in the Idea, resulting in this intimate union (*innige Vereinigung*) of idea and historical form. It is therefore the true idea of Spirit as exhibited, at the same time, in the determinate form of historicity.

(VGP, W19, 529–530)⁶

The Fathers of the Church might have anticipated the idea of historicity by insisting, against the Gnostics, on the reality of the life of Christ, that is, on the historical dimension of the incarnation. In these two passages, however, historicity is not concerned with philosophy but, more generally, with the status of Spirit (objective and absolute). What is the difference between the concepts of history and historicity? What does it mean for philosophy?

History, for Hegel is the development, the progress of Spirit across a series of stages. Historicity refers more particularly to the fact that all human collectives, any work of

Spirit (institutions, art, religion, philosophy), even any thinking, has to be attached to just such a history. The concept of historicity thus means for Hegel that the relationship of Spirit to its history, to its past, belongs to the very essence of Spirit, thereby pointing out the temporal depth of Spirit. With the Greeks, historicity, symbolized by Mnemosyne, is exemplified in their interest in history, with Herodotus figuring as the inventor of history. But it is Christianity that provides Hegel with the conceptual matrix for historicity, to the extent that, with the incarnation and the death of Christ, this religion claims that what is taken to be absolutely eternal, God, the divine, in fact itself also belongs to time, to history. Passing from religion to philosophy, which constitute the final form of Absolute spirit, Hegel applies this schema to thinking, which is itself also supposed to be timeless, but which in fact unfolds across historical time:

These acts of thinking (*Taten des Denkens*) appear first of all, as historical, to be a thing of the past and so to be beyond *our actuality* (*Wirklichkeit*). But in reality, what *we* are, we are also historically (*was wir sind, sind wir zugleich geschichtlich*) or, to put it more exactly, just as, in this domain, the history of thinking, the past is only one side of things, so also in what we are, what is imperishable and common to all is also itself indissolubly related to what we are historically.

(VGPE [1823], 6)

So the historicity of philosophy means: (1) a rootedness in the present with, as its corollary, the impossibility of foreseeing the future, and (2) an irreducible link with the past, representing the temporal depth of Spirit. Even if Hegel invented the term historicity, he still owes a lot to Herder with regard to certain aspect of this concept. In his philosophy of history, he borrows from Herder the notion of the *singularity* of each epoch (each epoch is unique) and the principle of the *irreversibility* of history (humanity cannot retrace its steps). In his introduction to the history of philosophy, in one of his rare references to Herder, he mentions the idea of tradition as a '*sacred chain*' (*heilige Kette*) binding individuals, even peoples and epochs, a connection that is also valid of philosophies (VGPE [1823], 7).⁷

The historicity of philosophy

The claim that the philosopher, no less than other individuals, cannot go beyond the present time and foresee the future is recalled in many of Hegel's texts.⁸ Historicity figures here as an epistemic limit, a limit that means that 'the philosopher has nothing to do with the prophet' (VG, 210). The philosopher must on the contrary concentrate upon the present, whose major tendencies and specific problems have to be caught and formulated in thought. This 'presentism' (Renault 2015), however, is far from being a heated reaction, an immediate commentary on what is happening; for, as opposed to journalism, which Hegel himself even attempted for a while at Bamberg (in 1807–1808), philosophy intervenes only after the event, indeed after some considerable interval of time. This is what he meant by his famous image of the Owl of Minerva:

One more word about giving *instruction* as to what the world ought to be. Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the *thought* of the world, it appears only when actuality has completed its process of formation and attained its finished state. The teaching of the concept, which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal grasps this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the falling of dusk.

(PR, 16; GPR, GW14.1, 16)

In this passage Hegel emphasizes, yet again, the historicity of philosophy, which results not just from its being rooted in time, situated in its epoch, but also, and more especially, from the fact that it is subject to a historical development which must already have run its course before it could even be thought in concepts. Here, he probably has in mind the relation of his own philosophy to the French Revolution. On the one hand, this submission of philosophical thinking to historical reality is a form of modesty on the part of philosophy, limiting the scope of its practical ambitions. On the other hand, as we have seen, Hegel highlights the need for a philosophy resulting from a crisis, from a conflict between opposing principles, as was, for example, in his own epoch, the conflict between Faith and Reason, inherited from the Enlightenment. At such critical moments, moments of transition between one epoch and the next, philosophy can recover a practical dimension, so that the image of the owl that simply witnesses what happens, has to be modified. In fact, Hegel emphasizes that the need for philosophy prescribes a twofold task for philosophy in history: not only to understand retrospectively the logic of what has taken place but also to extract the principle presiding over the arrival of a new epoch, by giving ideal expression to this principle in thought. Through its critical activity, philosophy accelerates the decline and the corruption of the preceding world, without which the next could not emerge, and so be approved by philosophy. This is how that 'superb sunrise' of the French Revolution got itself started out of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, whose principle of freedom, of the universality of the will, furnished the conceptual basis of the Revolution (W12, 528–529). Karl Ludwig Michelet, the editor of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, who was also one of his disciples, went so far as to complete the image of the silent and nocturnal owl with that of the cock crowing, his song announcing the dawn:

On the one hand, Hegel admitted that philosophy painted only grey on grey; but at the same time, he also said, just as explicitly, that philosophy, as that consciousness a given time develops of itself, goes beyond that time, and so also carries the seeds for the development of a higher figure. I therefore fully subscribe to his thought, and it was my own words I thought I saw him approve when I made it clear that philosophy is not just the owl of Minerva, which only takes flight at nightfall, but also the crow of the cock announcing the dawn of the new day.

(Michelet 1843: 398)

It is difficult to reconcile the thesis of the historicity of philosophy with the idea of the End of History or the End of Philosophy, which from Nietzsche to Fukuyama, passing across Kojève, has sometimes been attributed to Hegel.⁹ For if philosophy cannot play the prophet, if it is rooted in its present, it cannot pretend to be the final account, cannot claim that, in the future, there will be no more problems and tensions, no more new crises capable of giving rise to new philosophies. This point is confirmed by the conclusion of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, which finishes with the following words: 'Such is the point of view of the present time, and with it the series of spiritual configurations is, for the present (*für jetzt*), brought to an end. Therewith the history of philosophy is closed (*beschlossen*)' (VGP, W20, 461).¹⁰ The closure of the history of philosophy is, as is indicated without any ambiguity by the use of the expression 'for the present', a factual closure, which affects the Lectures themselves but not the historical becoming of philosophy. Hegel adds that 'the mole keeps on digging deep inside', in the sense that universal spirit never stops its underground progression (VGP, W20, 462).¹¹ He no doubt knew that other philosophies would succeed his own system, which would itself be discussed and criticized in turn. This is what is suggested in a letter from Christian Hermann Weisse to Hegel on 11 July 1829: 'You yourself, revered master, once told me that you were fully convinced of the need for new progress and new forms of the universal spirit, even beyond the form of science completed by you, without being able to give me a more precise account of these new forms' (*Briefe* III, 261). Unfortunately, we don't have Hegel's reply to this letter. But Eduard Gans expresses the same idea in his preface to his edition of the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* of 1833:

Perhaps, in many years, this book will pass into common representation and consciousness, like the whole system: its terminology will be lost, and its depths will become the common good. So, at that moment, its time is philosophically over, and it belongs to history. A new progressive development of philosophy, born of the same fundamental principles, is manifesting itself, another conception of reality, also changed. We will greet this future with respect.

(Gans 1833: XVII)

With this affirmation, Gans is only applying to Hegel the theses of his own preface to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, according to which, a way of thinking, like that of Plato's *Republic*, is linked to its epoch and cannot remain eternally valid. Along the same lines, one might think that the Hegelian model of a hereditary constitutional monarchy has itself been superseded by the emergence of the democratic model in the world during the twentieth century. The critique proposed by Axel Honneth (2010) offers, in my view, a good example of a new development, an update of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

History of philosophy and philosophy of history

In the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of time, the term 'presentism' designates the theory according to which only the present exists, the past and the future having been relegated

to nothing. If this acceptance of the term is valid for the theory of natural time, as presented by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Nature*, where he says, at §258, that 'the "present" makes a tremendous demand – it is nothing but the individual "present"' (EPN, 231; W9, 50; translation modified),¹² this does not hold for the presentism exposed in the preface to his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*. For the kind of presentism associated with Hegel's philosophy includes the depth of the past. That is the second sense of the historicity of philosophy: the fact that every philosophy is tied in with the 'sacred chain' of the tradition, with regard to which it constitutes a new link certainly, but one which is, for all that, still tied to its predecessors. So philosophy gets inscribed both into the present and into a specific history. This view of historicity raises a difficulty, frequently underlined at the beginning of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Philosophy deals with a truth that is 'eternal and imperishable', even while history itself tells us what has happened, therefore 'what is contingent, transitory and past' (VGPE [1820], 13). What are the answers Hegel offers to resolve this contradiction, which is only an apparent contradiction, at least for him?

Hegel is one of the first philosophers to enquire thematically into the meaning and the possibility of the history of philosophy. He is certainly not the first to have approached philosophy in this historical way, since this approach is as old as philosophy itself, as we find in Book A of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, for example. He is also not the first to introduce this teaching into the university world, since there was Jacob Thomasius, from the end of the seventeenth century, who wrote his *Origines Historiae philosophicae et ecclesiasticae*, which was published at Halle in 1699. But in Hegel's day, the history of philosophy begins to be treated as a *problem*, and not just as a fact or as a discipline. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, who were still committed to the *philosophia perennis*, also discussed the philosophers of the past, but without reflecting upon the very idea of a history of philosophy, that is, on the question of how philosophy, which for them is founded in an eternal rationality, could even have a history. Kant tackled this question in his short piece entitled: *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*, a text written around 1788 and published by Rink two months after Kant's death in 1804: 'A philosophical history of philosophy is itself possible, not historically or empirically, but rationally, i.e. *a priori*. For although it establishes facts of reason, it does not borrow them from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason, as a philosophical archaeology' (Kant 2004: 417; Ak. XX, 341). All the same, such an archaeology of reason reduced the history of philosophy to a summary succession of three stages: dogmatism, scepticism and criticism, all three of which are outlined by Kant at the very end of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the final and programmatic chapter on 'The History of Pure Reason'. The fully temporal dimension of this history remained secondary and was never clarified further. Other philosophers have tried, from different points of view, to solve the puzzle raised by the history of philosophy. In his work: *Über Philosophie und ihre Geschichte*, published at Jena in 1811, Karl Friedrich Bachmann took the view that philosophies are not separated from each other like monads, each following its own intrinsic development. On the contrary, their temporal succession can be laid out in one single and organically integrated continuity. Hegel, who might himself have inspired these theses of Bachmann,¹³ deepens the examination of these ideas in

his Lectures devoted to the History of Philosophy, which he gave every two years at the University of Berlin from 1820 up to his death in 1831. His originality consists, above all, in his having clarified the legitimacy and the significance of the historicity of philosophy.

To analyse the historicity of philosophy, Hegel considered the history of philosophy, in part, along the lines of world history, the kind of History examined in his philosophy of history. He takes care to apply the distinction between *res gestas* and *historia rerum gestarum*, between *Geschichte* (history as event) and *Historie* (history as knowledge of the past). As a result, the history of philosophy is seen to be founded on an event history of human thinking, and so becomes that history whose events are thoughts.¹⁴ Indeed, it lays out the 'acts of thinking reason' (*die Taten der denkenden Vernunft*) just as political history is constituted by 'acts of wilful reason' (*die Taten der wollenden Vernunft*) (VGPE [1823–1824], 144). Above all else, Hegel sees in the history of philosophy something very different from an atemporal archaeology of reason, that is, an objective history, made up of acts (*Handlungen, Taten*) and events (*Begebenheiten, Ereignissen*), which are nothing other than the thoughts of philosophers, to the extent that they marked a decisive break in the history of philosophies, a break between a 'before' and an 'after'. Hegel often reminds us that a philosophical thought is an act of thinking, a 'rational event' (*vernünftige Begebenheit*) (VGPE [1820], 29).¹⁵ His history of philosophy also contains some elements of what Nietzsche ([1874] 1980) would call a 'monumental history', insofar as the 'great man' and the philosopher, both of whom are called 'heroes', are the creators of the events of which this history is made. What distinguishes the actors of world history from individuals working in philosophical history, 'the heroes of thinking reason' (VGPE [1820], 5), is that the latter do not act according to the particularity of their character and so under the impulse of their passions, but are able to elevate their thinking up to the universal level of pure thinking, thereby grasping the principle that animates the spirit of their time. Philosophical creations depend 'on the universal character of human being as human' (VGPE [1823], 6).

To clarify the meaning of the history of philosophy, Hegel applies to it still other categories drawn from the philosophy of history. The temporal becoming of philosophies is a 'development *in time*' (VGPE [1820], 29), which brings with it 'numerous changes' (VGPE [1829–1830], 315), constituting a 'progress' in thinking. In the course of this progression, each new philosophy supersedes its predecessor, implying thereby both its *negation* – its *refutation* – and its *preservation*. What is refuted in a past philosophy is not its principle, which is itself conserved, but its 'unilaterality', its pretention to being 'the last point of view, the ultimate goal of philosophy' (VGPE [1827–1828], 289). As a result, the most recent philosophy is not the last and definitive truthful figure but the richest and most concrete, which thereby becomes a 'mirror of the entirety of its history' (VGPE [1820], 45). To the metaphors of the sacred chain and the mirror used to describe the history of thoughts, Hegel adds that of a treasure that is constantly being enriched (VGPE [1820], 5) and especially that of an organism. The history of philosophies is an 'organic system, a totality, which *contains within it a richness of stages and moments*' (VGPE [1820], 24). Taking up the Cartesian image of the tree of philosophy, he writes in the introduction to his *Encyclopaedia* of 1830 that: 'With regard to philosophies that appear diverse, the *history of philosophy* shows, on

the one hand, that there is only One philosophy at diverse stages of its formation and, on the other, that the particular *principles* on which each system is grounded, one by one, are only *branches* of one and the same whole' (EL, §13). Hegel adds another image. He who seeks in vain the true philosophy amongst all the philosophies that have ever existed in the course of its history is like someone looking for fruit at the market, and who refuses cherries, pears, grapes, etc., on the grounds that these are not fruits. Philosophy can only exist across its historically successive exemplifications.

Antiquarian history versus conceptual history of philosophy

After having taken place in the form of acts and events, the history of thought gives rise to the written history of philosophy, to be found in the manuals and works of philosophers. In that part of his course devoted to the manuals of the history of philosophy, Hegel recalls that 'the name "history" has this double meaning, that it is the acts and events themselves, and, on the other hand, that these acts are formed by representation (*Vorstellung*), for representation' (VGPE [1825–1826], 359).¹⁶ This distinction between what I have called event history and its representation does not only apply to the political history of states. It also applies to the history of philosophy, provided only that the difference between the former and the latter is made absolutely clear. While access to sources, to past actions, is necessarily mediated by the work of those historians who related the events in their political history, philosophical history, according to Hegel, can offer immediate access to sources, by putting us in direct contact with these very events, which are the thoughts contained in the texts of the philosophers:

The sources here are of a different kind than in political history. In the history of philosophy, the acts themselves present themselves to us, in political history on the other hand, the sources are historians. Herodotus, Thucydides have already recorded the acts of their time in history, that is, in the form of representation ... In the history of philosophy, it is not the historians, but the acts themselves that are before us. The works of significant philosophers are still available to us; they are our true sources; if we want to seriously study the history of philosophy, we must refer to these sources themselves.

(VGPE [1825–1826], 359)

In the case of philosophy, reading the works of historians of philosophy is always possible, without being at all necessary, if only because philosophical thoughts are themselves events expressed directly in original works of philosophy. There is no 'phonocentrism', in Derrida's sense of that word, to be found here, a phonocentrism which would favour the living word of the philosophers over their dead writings. Hegel thinks that in reading the texts of a philosopher we are able to grasp the very thinking of its author, inasmuch as it constitutes a specific event in the history of philosophy. This immediate access to the sources is itself certainly mediated by our own thinking, by

that time to which we belong, but it does not undergo the supplementary deformation of the historian's story, except when the original texts are lost.

In his lectures, Hegel reviews the available manuals of the history of philosophy of his time. He refers to them in pejorative terms, reminiscent of the 'antiquarian history' denounced by Nietzsche half a century later in his essay *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* ([1874] 1980). This history is put down as a 'recital of innumerable opinions', an accumulation of knowledge that is both useless and uninteresting, motivated only by scholarly 'erudition' (VGPE [1820], 16). Hegel has in mind Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann in particular, with his *Geschichte der Philosophie* in twelve volumes (Leipzig, 1798–1817), which in his view, is nothing but the 'enumeration of opinions of all kinds wrongly claiming to have captured the truth of the matter' (VGPE [1825–1826], 212). A history of philosophy like this is just a recital relating the succession of thoughts, making up this history in the inadequate form of representations (*Vorstellungen*), an ambiguous term designating, for Hegel, a thinking affected by sensibility (intuition, imagination, memory, symbols, etc.), a picture-thinking incapable of acceding to the universality of the concepts, and so of capturing the connections between them. In certain cases, this kind of history can turn out to be useful, particularly when the sources are only accessible with difficulty, as for the authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries presented by Johann Gottlieb Buhle (*Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Göttingen, 1796–1804, 8 volumes, mentioned by Hegel in VGPE [1825–1826], 362). But manuals of the history of philosophy are for the most part treated by Hegel as anachronistic and non-speculative, even if, as in the case of Dieterich Tiedemann, they lay claim to being speculative (*Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*, Marburg, 1791–1797, 7 volumes; see VGPE [1825/1826], 361). He calls this history of philosophy an 'external history' (VGPE [1819], 115) because it remains purely descriptive and does not assess the very content of philosophies.

What are the consequences of this transformation of philosophical concepts into representations? The thoughts of former philosophers are first of all treated as past, and so separated from the living present. The 'historicizing tendency' (*historische Tendenz*) is only interested in the past in and for itself. But, as Hegel notes in his Lectures of 1825–1826, 'the past as such is not, for it no longer exists, and so remains lifeless' (VGPE [1825–1826], 231). Also, this antiquarian history of philosophy only deals with the relics of ideas, consisting of an erudition that only relates to 'what is dead, buried and decomposed' (VGPE [1820], 47). Hegel condemns it with a dismissive formula borrowed from the new testament: 'Let the dead bury the dead, and follow me' (VGPE [1825–1826], 231). Nietzsche also used this formula about antiquarian history, not without modifying it with a touch of irony: 'Whether they know it clearly or not, at any rate they act as though their motto were: let the dead bury the living' ([1874] 1980: 18).

In this antiquarian treatment of philosophy, the historian only relates the ideas of other thinkers with what looks like impartiality. So far from being truths that engage his reflection, they remain opinions only valid for the thinkers in question, and their epoch. The thoughts of former philosophers are treated as subjective representations, simple opinions, whose description can only be boring and without interest for others. In this context, Hegel stresses the clearly cut distinction between concepts (*Begriffe*) and representations (*Vorstellungen*):

An opinion is a *subjective representation*, an arbitrary thought, a fiction that I can form in such and such a way, and that another individual will form differently; *an opinion is mine (eine Meinung ist mein)*; it is not a universal thought in itself, which might exist in and for itself. However, philosophy does not contain opinions – there are no philosophical opinions. When one hears someone talking about philosophical opinions, one notices at once that he lacks anything like a *fundamental education*, and this even if he is in fact a historian of philosophy. Philosophy is the objective science of truth, the science of its necessity, knowledge through concepts – not the act of opining or weaving opinions.

(VGPE [1820], 18)

An opinion is what is mine, and so remains, by definition, particular and contingent. Never can it attain the status of a thought. For all that, the 'habitual and superficial representation' of the history of philosophy in vogue in the manuals of his epoch fail to make this distinction (VGPE [1820], 15). Hegel accentuates the shortcomings of the historians of philosophy of his time, at the head of which he places Tennemann, and confronts them with a philosophical history of philosophy, a history made up of thoughts, a history no longer founded on representations, but on concepts. This conceptual history of philosophy¹⁷ no longer has for its object 'the past, an external past, but the present, the very presence of thoughts, which can only be apprehended by means of concepts' (VGPE [1823–1824], 156). Instead of bearing on what is dead, the latter aims at 'what is actually alive' (VGPE [1820], 47). *Nostra res agitur* (This is our affair). This is Hegel's emblem, taken to imply a return to the works of the philosophers themselves, to bring these philosophies back to life and to question their truth as so many conceptual events available to the history of philosophy. Conceptual history takes philosophies as universal processes of thought and not as simple opinions. It is a matter of grasping the meaning of thoughts in that sense in which the meaning is 'the relationship to a universal, to an Idea' (VGPE [1823–1824], 139). When the history of philosophy responds to this conceptual requirement, it becomes itself a philosophical activity, an act integrated into the event history of thinking. With this philosophical history of philosophy, Hegel is able to affirm that 'the *study of the history of philosophy* is the *study of philosophy* itself, and can't be anything other than that' (VGPE [1820], 27–28).

The temporality of thoughts

Hegel holds, perhaps in too optimistic a way, that in the history of philosophy 'everything is conserved' (VGPE [1827–1828], 292). This does not mean that a philosopher's every last reflection is saved, just what is essential to his thinking. What is preserved are its principles and its fundamental concepts, along with their universal content (VGPE [1827–1828], 292). What makes it possible for philosophical principles to resist the passage of time? Philosophical thoughts are certainly preserved in written works, on parchments, in books, by means of which they are preserved from the action of time, and so from being forgotten. But what about such rare writings as those that

are reserved for a limited number of initiates, how have they been able to cross the centuries, and so get to us? Hegel explains his point of view in the introduction to his Lectures of 1820:

These acts [of the history of philosophy] are therefore not only deposited in the temple of memory (*Erinnerung*), as *images* of what was, but they are still as present today, as alive now as they were at the time of their appearance. They are the actions (*Wirkungen*) and works (*Werke*) that have not been deleted or destroyed by those that followed them; it is neither the canvas, nor the marble, nor the paper, nor the representation, nor the memory that constitute the element in which they have been preserved – elements that are themselves perishable or form the ground of the caducity – but it is the thinking, the imperishable essence of Spirit, where neither moths nor thieves enter; the acquisitions of thinking, as they are integrated with it, constitute the very *being* of Spirit. This is precisely why this knowledge is not *erudition*, the expertise on what is dead, buried and decomposed. The history of philosophy concerns what does not age, what is still currently alive.

(VGPE [1820–1821], 47)

In the history of philosophy, the preservation of thoughts is not limited to memory, to the confines of the 'temple of Mnemosyne'. In the final analysis, such thoughts are not founded on material supports, like marble, canvas, paper, etc. The historicity of philosophy presupposes another kind of conservation, which is the work of thought alone. Acts of rational thinking are certainly expressed in words, in writings that endure – it is, after all, in words that we think, Hegel reminds us – but they owe their preservation still more to the activity of thinking itself, into which, according to the biblical expression, neither moths nor thieves can penetrate (Mathew 6.19 and Luke 12.33). Hegel points out the imperishable character of Thinking, as opposed to that of Things, subject to the destructive negativity of time, not to mention the domain of mental representations, destined to be fast forgotten. What is the meaning of this eternity of thought? At the beginning of his Lectures of 1825–1826, he claims that 'thought that is essentially Thought is in-and-for-itself, is eternal'. This eternity is not pure atemporality. The eternity of thought is immanent in time, thereby signifying that a thought 'is not true only yesterday and today but remains true outside all time (*außer aller Zeit*), and, to the extent that it does exist in time, it is true always and at all times (*zu jeder Zeit*)', so escaping the 'night of the past' (VGPE [1825–1826], 206). The eternity of philosophical thoughts is therefore manifest not as a pure atemporality, but as an omni-temporality, which itself implies the permanence and the intelligibility of these thoughts. Contrary to finite things, philosophical thoughts resist the negativity of time, and so remain imperishable, enduring across time and even beyond epochs: 'Philosophies are absolutely necessary and are, in consequence, the imperishable (*unvergängliche*) moments of a whole, of the Idea, even necessary moments of that whole; which is why they are preserved, not just in memory but in the more affirmative manner of philosophy' (VGPE [1823–1824], 154). Contrary to representations, to opinions or even to artistic and religious representations, philosophical thoughts can

be understood anew, thought through again with each new epoch, and so presentified (Hegel actually employs this very verb *vergegenwärtigen*):

We can certainly represent the lives of the Romans and the Greeks, but we cannot imagine ourselves bowing down to the statue of Olympian Jupiter, and representing him as God. On the other hand, Greek philosophy and Greek thought are what is pure. In them, we can exist completely, that is our thought. In philosophy, we are in the present because we remain in the realm of thought.

(VGPE [1829–1830], 327)

What is the reason for this omni-temporality of Thought, of Thinking? For Hegel, the answer is to be found in the very nature of thinking, in its universal character. Every act of thinking, every thought engenders a universality, which makes it possible for it to be permanently available for Spirit. In other words, it is because philosophical thoughts accede to a dimension of universality that it is possible to remember them, to repeat them, to actualize them in the present. With thoughts, 'we are dealing with the present, that is, with what is universal, where all particularity disappears' (VGPE [1828–1829], 328). The universality of thinking can transcend the past because it is maintained as a potential present, waiting to be taken up. Hegel thus reminds us that 'thought is what is common to all men', both in the sense that it is man's own and also, and more importantly, in that it can be shared (VGPE [1828–1829], 328). The philosophical thinking is certainly the work of a single individual, who decides to philosophize. However, a thought can only truly reach universality if it can be shared with others, written in a work where others will understand it again. The greater the 'depth [of a thought], the more universal it is' (VGPE [1828–1829], 327). It is therefore not simply because they are kept in books that the thoughts of philosophers, long after their death, are still present. On the contrary, it is because they are universal thoughts that they are reproduced in writings and then taken up by other thinkers.

The re-actualization of past thoughts is a form of presentification, one that does not, however, abolish its historicity. Hegel makes a critical commentary about this in the introduction to his Lectures of 1820 where he talks of 'the imitation and the repetition' (*Nachahmen und Wiederholen*) of ancient philosophers (VGPE [1820], 50). To be sure, the philosophies of Plato and of Aristotle, which Hegel never stops interpreting throughout his career, are always present, precisely on account of their universality. But it is never a matter of resuscitating the ancients, as did Marsile Ficin in his Platonic Academy or Just Lipse, with his Stoics. Wanting to go back to ancient philosophy in the hope of finding in it a viable point of departure is as impossible for Hegel as bringing mummies back to life. This is because the problems that arise in the context of a philosopher's own time relate to a different level of spiritual evolution from that of his. For example, 'in Plato, the questions relative to the *nature of freedom*, to the *origin of physical and moral evil*, to *Providence*, etc., do not find a philosophical solution' (VGPE [1820], 52). From the years of his 1805–1806 lectures, Hegel claims that Plato's theory of the state developed in his *Republic* is relevant only to ancient Greece, since it represents his time grasped in thought, even though this theory gets superseded in modern times: 'Plato did not expound an ideal but simply grasped the State of his

time from within. But this time is past' (JS III, GW8, 263). Philosophical truth is both present, in the sense that it can be understood again, and historically situated, as it expresses the principles, ideas, concepts and problems of its time. So Hegel thinks it is perfectly reasonable to understand Plato's *Republic*, grasp its arguments, take note of its logic, while one knows that this form of the state belongs to a superseded past, and so cannot be taken as a model for the present. Actualization is not imitation, still less an identical reproduction of the same. This historical and contextualist approach to (philosophical) truth has nothing to do with relativism. For the history of philosophy is connected with the philosophy of history, seeing in world history a progress, an attempt by people to advance the cause of Freedom.¹⁸

The reference to past philosophers is never, with Hegel, a nostalgic hope for a new beginning because he has always integrated their relevant concepts into his own system, through which they get cancelled and are nevertheless preserved (*aufgehoben*). A good example of this is his interpretation of Heraclitus, at the beginning of the *Science of Logic* (WdL, GW11, 45). He translates the Heraclitean sentence 'everything flows' as 'everything becomes', and then goes on to show how this becoming contradicts itself, and so gets stabilized under the category of *Dasein* (existence), something that is not to be found in Heraclitus himself. So, the omni-temporality of philosophical thoughts means that they can always be taken up in the living present, this is in accordance with a work of actualization through which these thoughts are modified and completed without ever losing their historicity. Furthermore, because historicity can be understood in two ways – the rooting in an epoch and in a tradition – truth, in the philosophical sense (I am not going into the question of scientific truth here), refers, on the one hand, to the adequateness of a philosophy to its time, its ability to conceptualize the principles of its epoch and, on the other, to its inscription in a secular history, where it only figures as a link in the chain, a stage (and here one finds the Hegelian *topos* of truth as becoming and as the result of a process).¹⁹

To conceptualize the historical becoming of philosophies, Hegel argues that 'the succession of philosophical systems in the history of philosophy is the same as the succession of conceptual determinations of the Idea in its logical deduction' (VGPE [1820], 27). When one extracts from philosophies their fundamental concepts, one is supposed to find the several stages of the logical Idea, just as it is presented in the *Science of Logic*. This is how Hegel makes of Heraclitus the philosopher of Becoming and the successor to Parmenides, whom he treats as the thinker of Being opposed to Nothingness. However, Heraclitus was older than Parmenides, even though he appears after the latter in the logical ordering. The history of philosophy is actually far from being perfectly attuned with Hegel's *Science of Logic*. According to Klaus Düsing, this thesis would amount to a *petitio principii* (1983: 26–38). But it would be just as reasonable to suppose, with Stefan Majetschak (1992: 334–335), that it only bears on the presentation of philosophies, and so not on the event history of the thoughts themselves.²⁰ This means that Hegel thought through, and organized, his history of philosophy within the logical ordering of his own system, thereby illustrating the fact that the actualization of past philosophies is by no means impartial. For it implies a transformation, which can only be undertaken at the behest of the principle of that philosophy which operates this actualization, and so is at the risk of forcing

the interpretation in question into the mould of a pre-established schema. If the presentation of the history of philosophy by Hegel is rooted (and it can't fail to be so) in his own philosophy, the *Science of Logic* is then certainly not the ultimate key to the history of philosophy, for other philosophies, arising after Hegel, could give rise to quite different, but equally valid, ways of understanding the history of thought.

Conclusion

The interest of the Hegelian account of the history of philosophy lies in pointing out the double dimension of the thought that is both *eternal* and *temporal*: *eternal* in the sense of omni-temporality, of a treasure-house of always available concepts; *temporal* because philosophy is rooted in the historicity of its epoch, in virtue of which it is the critical understanding of its time. The ultimate understanding of historicity, for Hegel, consists in the fact that what we are today is not born out of nothing but is the result of the work of many past generations, an inheritance whose privileged witness is the history of philosophy. It is precisely this recognition of historicity, this historical turn, that in my view, makes up the actuality of the Hegelian account of the history of philosophy. By working out this historicity with a new concept of eternity, one that remains immanent in time, Hegel looked for a new way between *philosophia perennis* and historical relativism. But after he died, philosophy quite often deviated from this track, either by going back to the antiquarian history recorded in manuals or, on the contrary, by leaping forward into an eternal conception of philosophy cut off from all historicity. To take just one example concerning this latter case, I would like to mention one of the founders of analytic philosophy, Gottlob Frege, whose entire career was spent at the University of Jena, the historic cradle of German Idealism. His distinction between 'thought' (*Gedanke*) and 'representation' (*Vorstellung*) reminds us of that drawn by Hegel between concept and representation.²¹ In an article that appeared in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, he writes:

So the result seems to be: thoughts (*Gedanke*) are neither things in the external world nor ideas (*Vorstellungen*). A third realm must be recognized. Anything belonging to this realm has it in common with ideas that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but has it in common with things that it does not need an owner so as to belong to the contents of consciousness. Thus for example the thought we have expressed in the Pythagorean Theorem is timelessly true, true independently of whether anyone takes it to be true. It needs no owner. It is not true only from the time when it is discovered; just as a planet, even before anyone saw it, was in interaction with other planets.

(Frege 1997: 337)

Frege seems to have taken from Hegel the view that ideas, as representations (*Vorstellungen*), have a bearer, to the extent that they are always carried by a particular individual, even while thoughts themselves are universal and eternal, and so true

for all time. But unlike Hegel, he does not assume the thesis that thoughts might themselves have a historicity, even though he admits that they can have an influence on world history across the actions of humans. This influence is not reciprocal; for history cannot bite into the atemporal field of thoughts. It is precisely to bring out the ahistorical eternity of thoughts that Frege offers a mathematical example, one which is strictly atemporal: Pythagoras' theorem. For Frege, thoughts make up the meaning of propositions capable of being true or false. But should philosophical thoughts be included in the same roster? If yes, then should he not also have admitted, like Hegel, a historicity of philosophical truth, which lies in its link with the history of past philosophies and its rootedness in a time, in a constellation of problems that are historically situated?

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Notes

- 1 I am going to focus on the *Berlin Introductions to the History of Philosophy*, for which Walter Jaeschke has provided us with a critical edition (VGPE). This edition offers the advantage of presenting separately the different texts: Hegel's manuscripts of 1820 and of 1823, as well as the manuscripts of his students (the 'Nachschriften') from 1819, 1820–1821, 1823–1824, 1825–1826, 1827–1828, 1828–1829 and 1831. In each case, I indicate the date of the lecture between brackets. I also use Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I–III* (VGP, W18–20). For developments in Hegel's History of Philosophy, devoted to specific philosophers, see Arndt, Bal and Ottmann (1999) amongst others publications.
- 2 Quotes from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* are from Knox's translation.
- 3 On this point, see Renault (2015: 39–44).
- 4 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Miller's translation.
- 5 See Fischbach (2003).
- 6 On historicity in the philosophy of Hegel, see Renthe-Fink (1964: 20–46). Renthe-Fink references the two occurrences of the term '*Geschichtlichkeit*' that I have cited, and favours the hypothesis according to which it was Hegel who invented the term. Note that the first occurrence illustrates Hegel's idealization of Greece and the second the primacy given to the 'Christian world of Western Europe'. For a critical approach to the Eurocentrism of the Hegelian history of philosophy, which goes beyond the scope of this chapter, see König-Pralong (2019).
- 7 See also VGP, W 20, 456.
- 8 See, for example, VG, 60; VGP, W 20, 455; VGPE [1825–1826], 237.
- 9 See Bouton (1998).

- 10 As d'Hondt (1987: 173–174) rightly notes, 'the philosophical development does not end at Berlin, any more than does the political life'; 'Hegel only describes the past, but he does not contest the possibility of the future.' See also on this issue Gérard (2008) and Renault (2015: 101–108).
- 11 See also PS, 6; PhG, GW 9, 14: 'Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward.'
- 12 The *Philosophy of Nature* is quoted according to Petry's translation.
- 13 Bachmann had attended the first course on the history of philosophy given by Hegel at Jena in 1805–1806. So Ehrhardt (1970: 150) suggests that it was Hegel who inspired Bachmann rather than the other way around.
- 14 See Bouton (2000).
- 15 In this chapter, 'thought' refers to '*der Gedanke*' in German, and 'thinking' to '*das Denken*'. We could say that thinking refers to an activity and thought refers to the result of that activity, to what is thought.
- 16 In this chapter, I have translated *Vorstellung*, which also means 'notion' or 'idea', as 'representation'.
- 17 'Conceptual history' here means not the history of concepts in the current sense of the word (*Begriffsgeschichte*), but history as apprehended by concepts (*begriffene Geschichte*).
- 18 See on this point Beiser (1993: 281–282).
- 19 On the thorny question of the historicity of truth in Hegel's philosophy, see Halbig (2004), who does not, however, deal with this question in the way in which it is posed in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.
- 20 See also de Boer (2017: 629): 'all determinations treated in the *Science of Logic* occur in the history of philosophy as well simply because that is where Hegel took them from. The order in which these determinations are treated in the *Logic* differs from their historical order, however, if only because the work is divided into a *Doctrine of Being*, a *Doctrine of Essence*, and a *Doctrine of the Concept*.'
- 21 See Wolff (2013: 99): 'In this regard, Frege's view concerning the objectivity of thought is comparable to that of Hegel, and it is possible that Frege was indirectly influenced by Hegel through his teacher Kuno Fischer.'

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Philosophy and its Time

Dina Emundts

The subject of what philosophy is, is itself a philosophical subject and not external to philosophy. At the same time, the topic is a special one, for it has a close relationship to what we do as philosophers. One might thus think that we can answer the question of what philosophy is by looking at ourselves and seeing the answer as a kind of self-interpretation. This idea, however, seems to be wrong because almost no philosopher thinks that his/her particular philosophy constitutes philosophy as a whole. If the answer to the question of what philosophy's subject matter consists in were a self-interpretation, it would rather have to be an interpretation of the doing of philosophies; a critical self-interpretation of thinking. Hegel is one of those philosophers who believe that such a self-interpretation is possible and that the question of what philosophy is can be answered in this way in a kind of metaphilosophy. Hegel's option is possible because he holds a certain view of the relationship between philosophy, time and historicity. This relationship is of general importance for an answer to the question of what philosophy is. Someone who assumes that there are *eternal* philosophical truths can attribute them quite easily to the *one* true philosophy. In what follows, I will present Hegel's understanding of philosophy and discuss which understanding of the temporality of philosophical truths is linked to this concept of philosophy.

Hegel often comes to the subject of what philosophy is: in the introduction to the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (*Differenzschrift*), in the preface, introduction and final section of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, in the last part of the *Science of Logic* (*Logic*), in the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline* (*Encyclopaedia*), in the sections on Absolute Spirit in the *Encyclopaedia*, in the preface to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (*Philosophy of Right*) and in the fragments and lecture notes on the history of philosophy. From 1805–1806 onwards, the thought that philosophy develops played a central role. This means, firstly, that philosophy is always closely connected to its time and, secondly, that it is also the result of other philosophies.¹ Hegel clearly formulates an understanding of the historicity of philosophy in various places after 1805–1806.²

This makes it sound as if Hegel from 1805–1806 on would radically think philosophy historical and therefore also assume that it does not have to do with eternal truths. Can this be inferred from Hegel's view of the development of philosophy? In fact, given these claims, Hegel cannot assume that there are eternal truths that can be accessed at

any time independent of their respective time. That Hegel does not articulate this view is by no means trivial. Representatives of such a view of the recognizability of truths are, for example, Kant's Categorical Imperative and Descartes's idea of God.

Thus, Hegel does not accept the time-independent knowledge of truths. However, it is not yet ruled out that there are philosophical truths that people only gradually discover.³ There could be absolutely true sentences and contents. Kant also accepts this. The revocability of the principles of theoretical philosophy and of moral law is not intended by Kant.⁴ Hegel had made clear in various places that the idea of an unchangeable being or truth that is independent of temporal things cannot be consistently maintained.⁵

But even this does not mean that there can be no irrevocable (and in this sense absolute) truths for Hegel. Rather, there is another possibility for holding on to such claims within his framework: something could develop in the course of time as absolutely true. For example, what the state is in the best possible sense could be a result of a historical development. The world would develop in this way and thus what is philosophically said about the state would be absolutely true at a certain point in time and could be recognized. But that would not mean that it had always been true or could have always been recognized. On the one hand, it would be absolutely true and, on the other, it would depend on our time and a certain development that has preceded our time.⁶

This idea of a development seems to imply teleology. This is at least the case if there is a perfection of the development, a kind of exploitation of the possibilities of things in a positive sense.⁷ Then things have a kind of essence, although this only becomes clear and manifest through development. Such an idea can be specified such that the teleological development of different beings (e.g. of different species, different institutions, etc.) as a whole are also teleological: in the end designed for *one* purpose. This purpose can, for example, be the purpose of self-knowledge or freedom. Since the development is thought teleologically and is monistically purposeful, an absolute truth and its knowledge are also possible. This interpretation of Hegel's writings has often been advocated.⁸ Against this background, if one claims that philosophy is the self-interpretation of thought, then it means that our thoughts direct themselves in a movement beyond different individual philosophies towards a common purpose, hence being recognizable as that one unitary movement. This movement and its cognition is philosophy. If one follows this line, it seems to be natural to also interpret this theologically. The assumption of a God *qua* self-realizing and self-recognizing being seems to fit very well with this conception of truth.

But just in this way this interpretation also loses part of its persuasiveness in my eyes. First of all, I understand Hegel's statement that philosophy somehow replaces religion and that the latter operates only in the mode of representation, such that we actually cannot regard these theological views as true statements, but only as auxiliary constructions through which something becomes clear. According to the reading presented, however, the opposite seems to apply: a theology of God's self-knowledge ultimately better expresses what is going on. Second, it seems to me that there is still too much essentialism in the proposal, so that, in my view, it is difficult to associate it with Hegel's criticism of essentialist conceptions. For in the end the divine that comes

to knowledge has to be understood as something that is persisting as the same – that is, as a substance. Thus, the whole movement of everything starts from a kind of substance and is carried by it. To me, a more radical reading seems more appropriate. We must give up this idea of something that ‘as such’ persists. We must achieve a point of view from which there is no longer any need to understand this movement as that of a substance, but rather only as an activity of thinking. This is so because, I think that, for Hegel, only thinking leads to substantiality.⁹ Third, the persuasiveness of this proposal depends on how one reads certain passages in Hegel. For example, I read the chapter ‘Wirklichkeit’ in such a way that Hegel shows here that there can be no *causa sui* figure of thought.¹⁰ Thus, there can also be no thought of God as the one who produces himself. The turning point in this chapter is, according to my reading, the idea that only thinking is absolute. I think that Hegel wants to replace the idea of God with this idea. Thinking cannot explain what the first cause is, but there is a nexus of interconnections in thought in which all things are embedded. This is the absoluteness of thinking.¹¹

In contrast to the teleological interpretation sketched thus far, one can also maintain the thesis that Hegel does not at all want to assert that there are irrevocable truths, but rather that the future is open.¹² One can refer here to many passages in which Hegel claims that all philosophy is time-dependent. However, caution is called for here. As we have seen so far, this excludes certain concepts of truth (those that assume time-independent principles) but not necessarily those that assume a teleological conception of truth. Nevertheless, this reading of Hegel can raise the same objections to the teleological reading that I myself made against the latter above. Above all, this reading is motivated by the expectation that Hegel does not simply assert the end of every philosophy and development. First, one has the impression that this would somehow be quite naïve. Second, it would be decisively more difficult to find his philosophy still attractive today. But the claim that Hegel assesses the philosophy of his time with regard to its developmental potentials in exactly the same way as philosophy before his time did does not seem to fit well with many of Hegel’s statements. Obviously, he thinks that his philosophy is a science in a way that none of the philosophies before his time were.¹³

In the following, I would therefore like to defend a reading that I regard as a third option. According to my reading, Hegel’s philosophy is indeed not revisable in the sense in which the philosophies of his predecessors were. The reason for this is that it refers in a new way to its predecessors. Although every philosophy results from its past and its predecessors, in Hegel’s philosophy the result is not a new content, but rather a method. The point of Hegel’s philosophy is to recognize philosophy as a certain method for finding the truth. With this method, content-related assertions also prove to be true.

Thus, one has to focus on what Hegel says about the method to understand the kind of truth that he claims for his philosophy. In this chapter, I am going to demonstrate this. First, I will interpret Hegel’s theses on method and interpret the last section of his *Logic* to this end. Then, I would like to show that this understanding of philosophy fits the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Encyclopaedia*. In the last part, I finally summarize the main points and return to some questions for my interpretation.

The method of philosophy according to Hegel's *Logic*

Hegel ends his three-volume *Logic* with the section 'Idea', the last chapter titled 'The Absolute Idea'. In the chapter 'The Absolute Idea', it is said that the absolute idea has no content of its own but is 'the method' (SL, 736).¹⁴ These assertions seem to support my thesis that Hegel sees the basic point of his philosophy in having recognized its correct method. However, they are of course in need of explanation. First of all, I would like to approach Hegel's theses by looking at the text, namely at the part of the *Logic* entitled 'Idea'. Through a brief interpretation of this part, the basic idea should become clear once situated within Hegel's framework before considering more systematically the idea of method in the next two parts.

'Method' in the last part of the *Logic*

Method is the 'general [*das Allgemeine*] according to its form'.¹⁵ The conceptual principles developed in the *Logic* constitute 'the general'. The method of this development of logical principles is to be considered at the end of the *Logic*. This happens after it has been stated that, after the development of the logical principles, it is also clear that philosophy is nothing other than a 'coming back to itself' (SL, 735).

I begin with an explanation of the last claim. At the end of the *Logic* at the transition to the section 'Idea', it is clear that truth as a congruence of concept and reality is an evolving process that also implies knowledge of that process. One can ask here why truth is at all thematized in the *Logic*. But it has to be considered that Hegel's *Logic* is also meant to be a kind of metaphysics and category theory. General metaphysics is about the structure of reality and other category-theories are often also about the question of the validity of categories. The categories are often also meant to be such that agreement with the principles to be derived from them is (at least a necessary) condition for the truth of an assertion. In both respects, truth is also a topic in Kant's transcendental logic. According to Hegel, the subject of truth does not belong to the *Logic* because there is a task of justification. Rather, Hegel's idea is that it has emerged in the past parts of the *Logic* that subjective activities, judgement and inference gain objectivity. This is why the previous part, before 'Idea', is called 'Objectivity'. 'Objectivity' (similar to *Wirklichkeit* at an earlier stage) as a conceptual determination captures the fact that subjective conceptual principles become (according to Hegel) objective through the necessary connection that preceding conclusions have. The binding nature of the principles makes it possible to determine something objectively and as an object.¹⁶

The main idea behind this development towards objectivity before the section 'Idea' can be summarized as follows: the meaning¹⁷ of 'object' and 'objectivity' implies that the something termed an object is self-standing and receives its determination through itself. According to the subjective logic, the logical process of reasoning indeed reaches a point where we have a (conceptual) self-standing entity. This self-standing entity is (1) no single concept or statement. It is a complex of different kinds of conceptual operations and inferences. (2) This self-standing entity is not something purely conceptual from which we could separate the non-conceptual. (3) Furthermore,

the process of becoming objective (in reasoning) is itself part of the object and is not possible without the subjective activities of cognition. Given the achievement of this self-determining object resultant from thinking, we have also reached a correspondence between concepts and reality, for if we take together all these aspects, the object is both real and conceptual. The correspondence of concept and reality is (commonly) also called 'truth,' and Hegel deals with the concept of truth in the last part of the *Logic* under the term 'Idea'.

In what sense Hegel thinks that philosophy is about self-knowledge and a 'coming back to itself' can already be explained to some extent on the basis of what I have just explained: philosophy is about truth. When truth comes about through a process, which we also constitute by thinking and recognizing it, then truth is something that implies self-relation, cognition is a form of self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is a condition for that truth to be recognized and for it to take place. Hegel, however, goes farther than the claim that recognition is always also linked to self-cognition. Saying that cognition is not only linked to but *is* self-cognition means: objectivity is achieved only through thinking, and truth is nothing else than the result of the logical movement towards objectivity. As Hegel puts it: 'The absolute idea, as the rational concept that in its reality only rejoins itself' (SL, 735).

With this, the main structure of the section 'Idea' becomes clearer: as indicated, it begins with Hegel saying that the idea is 'the *adequate concept*, the objective true, or the *true as such*' (SL, 670). The idea is supposed to bring together the previous moments. It brings together in one concept what is supposed as the result of the conceptual 'movement' at the end of which stood objectivity. The result is that the subjective activity of judging and inferring is such that it leads to objectivity. Furthermore, the determination of the object in the section 'Objectivity' has shown that the first real object determined at the conclusion is life (not an individual object, but also not the totality of objects as a mechanism). The section 'Idea' claims that the first object considered under the title 'Idea' or 'truth' is 'life'. This means that life is an object that can be cognized in such a way that it fits the standard of an object as a kind of self-determination. We know this at this point of the *Logic* because of the logical operations of inferring in the last sections. At the same time, however, we know (at this point of the *Logic*) that knowledge belongs to truth. Therefore, after 'life', the idea of 'cognition' or, more precisely, the ideas of cognition of the truth and of the good, are developed. This becomes clear in its execution: the correspondence between concept and object in theoretical recognition and in practical recognition is initially not real, but the unity of both is present as an idea in striving, that is, as something that is to be produced.¹⁸ At the same time, there is, according to Hegel, a further moment: conceptual knowledge can be realized in action, that is, in this moment the concept is not something at which we merely aim; we can furthermore realize it. The section 'Idea' is not about the genesis of cognition out of life, but about the fact that these moments are necessary for the complete correspondence or even unity of concept and reality, which we mean by 'truth'.

If we now take these three different moments together – life as the unity of concept and object without knowledge, knowledge as striving to form a unity with the object and the realization of knowledge in action – then, according to Hegel, all moments of

truth are at hand. According to this, truth is generated when we determine life and the world according to our concepts, which are developed according to the idea of cognition and of the good. Truth is nothing a statement has without context. Truth is a kind of correspondence in which there really is no conceptual element that is not present in the relevant reality. If you say 'this dog is brown', the concept 'dog' (and 'brown') implies much more (and much less, by the way) than can be found in a single dog (namely, at first, other dogs). Furthermore, truth is also nothing statements together simply have. The concept of truth here is a completely different one: something is true insofar as it is real, is grasped conceptually, and the process of grasping it also leads to its reality,¹⁹ which is indeed shaped according to this grasping and is furthermore recognized as a truth constituted by this process. Thus, a sentence is only true insofar as it is part of a complex and ambitious activity of reasoning, which ends in a self-standing conceptual whole that implies reality and is not confronted with it.

According to this conception, it is true, for example, that in life the universal expresses itself directly as a species, that life is our basis as spiritual beings and that we recognize ourselves in this respect when we recognize life. It belongs to the knowledge of life that we recognize that we recognize ourselves in it as well. For if we do not recognize this, we do not understand how it can be true and how it can be recognized that the species expresses itself in the living individual.²⁰ These assertions may sound very general and, for some, almost banal. But if one compares them to the fundamental theses of other philosophers, they are by no means mundane. Again, we find here a theory of self-reference and self-knowledge. As long as we do not recognize these latter things – that is, as long as we do not have knowledge about what truth is in philosophy – we do not really recognize these other things (life, organisms) either – even if we could say correct things about the species and its specimens in biology. That philosophy is truth as a process of the self-understanding of thinking beings, which also has practical implications, means that true philosophical statements are characterized by precisely this conceptually transparent self-reference. This can take place in different forms and on different levels, but it is always a kind of self-knowledge. It is always a kind of cognitive repetition because objectivity has to be generated before grasping the process that leads to objectivity.²¹

According to these considerations, philosophy also brings us to the absolute idea. What does 'absolute idea' mean? If we understand the idea of truth then we also get the absolute idea, as the absolute idea is the movement in thinking that we discover together with the idea of truth. Hegel's *Logic* does not represent this movement of thinking in its reality (as in *Realphilosophie*), but rather as a logical process of thinking.²² While the *Logic* represents the movement of thinking, in the end, when one has recognized the movement in its character, one can also only focus on the form of this thinking, on method. This is what Hegel does in the end when he calls the absolute idea a method.

In summary, one can say that philosophy is a 'coming back to itself' consummated by developing the general principles of thinking in such a way that at the end of this process its knowledge is also recognized as a self-knowledge. Self-knowledge implies, conversely, an understanding of conceptual principles as processes. The method is the form of this process, and so it is also the form of self-knowledge. Furthermore, because the *form* of self-knowledge or the *form* of the process of logical principles can

be recognized as true at the end of the development of these conceptual principles, one can also say that the method of philosophy is recognized as true method. What is now asserted as a contentful philosophical statement can be formed with this true philosophical method and thus can be asserted as really being true. After this text-oriented explanation of method, I will now deal more directly with questions concerning the method.

The method of the *Logic*

It seems clear that, having reached the end of *Logic*, we will deal with the way in which logic proceeds: the method of logic. From the text it can be seen that there are mainly two methodological matters that are discussed in this last chapter: one question is how it can be that we do not presuppose anything in logic, although we (must) start with something. The other topic is the development of conceptual principles, that is, what Hegel himself calls the 'dialectical moment'? (SL, 745). It is clear, however, that it is not a matter of a merely supplemental reflection on method. Rather, two things should result from the previous course of logic: on the one hand, that we now reflect on the method and, on the other hand, what the method is.

The method of logic refers to Hegel's procedure in the *Logic*. This should be able to be described in such a way that logical categories (such as 'being', 'causality', etc.) and principles (of judgement or inference) develop dialectically 'apart' from one another. How this is to be understood is a difficult question and has been spelled out in different accounts.²³ In this chapter, the question is not how this method is to be understood and whether it is reasonable. Rather, my question is what this method means for Hegel's understanding of philosophy's relationship to its own time and for his own philosophical statements. Thus, I just want to give a sketch of how I understand Hegel's idea of this method: There is a development in thinking that leads from indeterminateness to determinateness via differentiations. This development takes place in the form of basic concepts and can be traced. The differentiations are made by spelling out different aspects that stand in a complex relation to each other. When this differentiation has been made, we get a new concept, because we gather the different aspects together, and just this is what the new concept consists in. The concept 'being'²⁴ is at first indeterminate with regard to that from which it is to be expressed. But precisely because of what this indeterminacy consists in, it is something that can actually be determined as being on the basis of it – differently than planned, namely via detours. The indeterminacy lies in the fact that what is determined as 'being' is (as long as nothing else is said about it) also not determined at all, which can (for reasons not to be spelled out here) be expressed in the concept 'nothing'. If we grasp this, we have a differentiation in the terms of 'being' and 'nothing' as aspects and in this way gain the term 'becoming' as what results when these aspects are taken together. With 'becoming', we can determine something not only as being but also in terms of the way it is being, namely as becoming. This is dialectical above all because the terms are connected to one another in a way that causes a dynamic movement and thus a transition from one to the next. These transitions are made possible by the implicit connections amongst concepts and are such that each one, even the concept

with which we begin the *Logic*, the concept 'being', in the end appears to be completely determined by its connection to the others.

However, Hegel not only claims that this dialectical moment in the development of concepts takes place but also that the concepts implied in the development are not such that they are opposed to reality. What exactly does that mean?

First of all, the answer could be: we do not have to answer the question whether something corresponds to concepts because one cannot meaningfully ask the question. To regard reality as something that stands over against concepts would presuppose that reality, for example, consists of something existing, but something existing is also always something conceptually defined. Because being is always conceptually determined as something definite, the question of correspondence is settled. However, this is not all Hegel wants to say about the connection between concepts and reality. Rather, Hegel also wants to show with his *Logic* that the question of correspondence cannot be answered for single statements; he wants to show that the idea of concepts and reality as two separated realms is not reasonable. It is for this reason that he discusses topics such as 'things in themselves' and 'Wirklichkeit' within the *Logic*. Two further points that hang together with the dialectical method play a role here. Firstly, Hegel's aim is not to deny, ignore or completely replace what is given with what is conceptual, but his point is that our concepts have a genesis, in which experiences play a constitutive role and the concepts are therefore never independent of what is given, but result from the process of grasping and understanding what is given in the first place. Just as concepts always have content through experience, so reality always has structure through concepts. I have argued on behalf of this thesis, which is certainly not undisputed amongst Hegelians, elsewhere.²⁵ In my summary above, however, it is also crucial that there is indeed something that we determine with 'being', thus, it is never *only* conceptual. Secondly, the development of concepts and principles (which is represented 'purely' in *Logic*) is such that their reality and objectivity is grasped as part of a conceptual determination. This does not need to be looked at here; I will come back to it in the next part of this chapter.

The method of logic thus consists in a dialectical development of conceptual principles, and this method should itself result in logical operations. A suggestion for understanding the latter could be that the method of logic within the *Logic* is the correct method of logic in general. To what extent should it *result* from the logical movement that the method used here is the *correct* logical method? Here one can first think of the fact that this method is intended to achieve a lack of presuppositions, which otherwise – according to Hegel (and his contemporaries) – is always a problem for establishing logical principles. Hegel's point on the topic of the presuppositions is that we indeed never can start without presuppositions (as others try), but that we catch up with the presuppositions we have made in the process of dialectical development. One can conceptually grasp the beginning. The fact that this is possible and thus that it can be shown that presuppositions are not problematic per se, proves the method of the *Logic* – in the end – to be the right method. From this point of view of the method's justification, it is understandable that, at the end of the *Logic*, Hegel returns to the question of the beginning of logic (SL, 741). Why Hegel makes use of the image of the circle in the last chapter also now becomes understandable. Although

one begins to draw a circle at one point, in the end this point is fully integrated and no longer recognizable as the beginning. 'The method, which thus coils in a circle, cannot however anticipate in a temporal development that the beginning is as such already something derived' (SL, 750).

All of this makes sense. Hegel, however, does not really aim to *justify* the method. It is rather that by looking at the logical movement we recognize – in a way we just *see* – that it is the form that is responsible for the movement becoming objective.²⁶ It is at this point that we look upon the form of what we have accomplished as a logical movement.

Why is this method according to Hegel the *absolute* idea? Absoluteness refers on the one hand to the recognition of thinking as a self-establishing movement, meaning that thinking becomes objective and real knowledge not through something external to it (via candidates such as God or reality), but through itself. On the other hand, this whole movement – as becomes obvious by looking at the movement – relies on the binding nature of the logic. *Realphilosophie* represents this movement in reality, *Logic* the same movement within thoughts.²⁷ But form remains as that which constitutes actual absoluteness. Whereas the movement of logical thinking is thus somehow dependent on the form (i.e. the dialectical method), the form is not dependent on anything else. Thus, form is the absolute idea.

These results are also very telling for philosophy. The recognition of the fact that everything depends on the logically binding nature of our principles in thinking changes the self-understanding of philosophy. It is not that we have to quarrel about contents. It is not that one philosophy can claim to have found the truth. It is rather that such logically binding force is the very ground of truth. This thesis can be sharpened, for it could be said that for Hegel philosophy is method.

Method of thinking

So far, I have spoken of the method in question as one of logic – of the dialectical development of logical concepts. It must, however, also be stressed that these considerations concerning method not only aim at completing an internal logical project. The method – as well as the *Logic* in general – is furthermore meant to be the method of thinking. This may always be the case when someone introduces logical principles, but it is a thesis to be considered on its own terms. To say that the method of thinking comes into view at the end of the *Logic* as the result of a logical development is once again a claim in need of interpretation.

One idea would be that logical principles can be proven to be valid. A proof of validity could proceed in such a way that one shows that it is only with these terms that one can successfully refer to reality. This is a Kantian project, and Hegel rejects it inasmuch as, in his opinion, one assumes that there are 'concepts', on the one hand, and 'reality', on the other.

Hegel's own project is not one of classical justification. Nevertheless, he also thinks that the principles of thought can be identified with those that structure reality. I have already mentioned Hegel's basic idea of this. There are two strands: (1) We operate with our concepts in life, on the basis of our liveliness, and with the living. Thus, there is

never a gap between concepts and real things in the sense that their development falls apart. As I said, I do not understand Hegel's philosophy with regard to the given in such a way that it somehow 'does not' exist, but in such a way that conceptual operations and the world of experience are formed in relation to each other. Causality is a principle with which I can order inorganic relations, but this order presupposes that there are relations of purposiveness because certain aspects of the precondition of this order (e.g. the continuity of an object to which I am referring) only become real through these relations of purposiveness. In a certain way, causality thus logically changes into a relation of purpose because this relation establishes the relation of causality. However, relations of purpose are not fictive or purely conceptual, but real in my world of experience. I can theoretically recognize that there must be relationships of purposiveness for causality to function as an explanatory principle. But causality only works because I can really determine and experience relationships of purpose. This combination of concepts and experiences leads to the fact that conceptual operations also contain content-related assumptions, such as that there are organism-like beings. (2) Nevertheless, one can of course philosophically ask whether a correspondence between concepts and reality really holds. There is no purely theoretical answer that can convey this to us, but in the end, it can be grasped by us. We recognize that this agreement does not simply exist, but that we make it in thinking. There is not something external that renders what we logically do real or objective, but thinking is real and objective by virtue of our doing it the way we do it. There are again two assertions here: what we think is subjective, on the one hand, because it is by our own doing (not by the world's essence or God) and what we think is objective, on the other, because it is not up to us, but to the binding nature of thinking. Thinking generates an internal commitment or, to put it in a way that more closely conveys Hegel's main point concerning method: logic generates an internal commitment in thinking. Thoughts become objective, namely one can think something with them. This is conceptually grasped when 'reality' and 'objectivity' arise in the (dialectical) procedure of determining concepts as elements of this determination. It is made explicit in the insight that philosophy culminates in the absolute idea that is method. Furthermore, we not only learn this 'theoretically' but also (have to) learn by acting in the world that our thinking determines the world. This again is something we also grasp within the logical movement. Hegel's understanding of method is thus also such that doing is part of the method. The function of practical knowledge and action plays for this reason a crucial role in the second chapter of the section 'Idea'.

The fact that 'reality' and 'objectivity' arise as *conceptual* determinations would be unsatisfactory if it just stood for itself. For if reality and objectivity are *conceptual* determinations, the question could be asked again how something can be said about reality with these concepts. But 'reality' and 'objectivity' are in the *Logic* not just separately listed conceptual determinations. Rather, logically seen, it is a making explicit of something that is part of the logical movement. The thinker can understand this by thinking and, in another aspect, by doing.

One can thus say that thinking actually becomes objective. In this sense, the method proves to be the right method in realizing that something can really be thought through it. The punch line of this thought is the following: logical principles and movements

are the subject of the whole *Logic*. All logical principles of the *Logic* prove to generate objectivity and to be valid.²⁸ They prove to be valid on a meta-level that is reached at the end: they prove to be valid when it is realized that it is the method of thinking that is not only subjective but also gains objectivity in the process. Thus, one understands that logic cannot be proven valid by showing that the world or things agree with logic. To stress that Hegel wants to distance himself from certain projects of justification, one should better say here: that we can think something through logical principles, that we can get to something objective, is *shown* within logic, or we can *see* it when we rethink the movement on a meta-level.

Hegel seems to suggest that the *whole* philosophical yield we have from logic is method. How this is to be understood has also already been suggested. The yield of logic is that the method that has been followed all the time and is finally recognized as a method is the method of philosophy. First of all, one can say that philosophy is nothing other than the knowledge of logical principles. One can go even further and claim: this knowledge is knowledge based on form. This turns out to be the case at the end of the *Logic*. To say it with pathos: the knowledge that results at the end puts everything in a new light – the ‘new’ light is the yield of Hegel’s *Logic*, while the logical principles, the philosophical content, were already ‘there’ before.

Hegel also emphasizes that we only refrain from the content at the end of logic, but this does not mean that logic has no content (SL, 735). As we know, the reason why the *Logic* has content lies, on the one hand, in the fact that logical concepts do not develop in a vacuum and, on the other, in the binding nature of conceptual operations. However, we should here consider again *what* content logic has. It is, for example, not arbitrary how one makes the claim that organic principles can be reduced to physical ones: according to Hegel, organisms can be described physically, but this is an abstraction from a richer form of representation that encompasses more aspects of our world. That it is this kind of reduction – and not the reduction to the actual basic elements of our reality – is conditioned by the logical order: causality passes over purposiveness, but in such a way that purposiveness is clearly more concrete and richer.²⁹

One of the content-related assertions to which logic commits us is thus that there are organisms and self-conscious beings that cannot be reduced to physical occurrences as that which actually exists. Other examples are statements about the relationship between nature and mind as well as the physical and mental functions of the human being. Furthermore, one can also make assertions about the connection between freedom and forms of government, as a certain complexity in the way in which man is free can only be met in certain forms of organization. Our modern way of being free, which in turn has by no means accidentally developed itself in this way, corresponds to a modern conception of morality, whereby this correspondence should imply that one would not be possible without the other. In a historical situation, we need not figure this out; they have rather so developed that way together.

These examples and formulations remain open with regard to some questions that I raised at the beginning about the theses of revisability. Before I turn to these questions in part three, I would like to discuss other writings to confirm my thesis that Hegel’s philosophy, according to Hegel himself, mainly consists in the insight that philosophy is a method of thinking.

Philosophy as a method in *Phenomenology* and *Encyclopaedia*

Phenomenology of Spirit

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* connects the idea that every philosophy is the result of its predecessors with the surprising thesis that the repeating course through all philosophies brings about something qualitatively new: 'Besides, it is not difficult to see that our own epoch is a time of birth and a transition to a new period' (PS, 8).³⁰

This connection between continuous development and qualitative leap becomes understandable if one assumes that it concerns above all the method of philosophy. For then the insight into the fact that philosophy as it was has to be understood as a method is that which causes something qualitatively new.

According to the *Phenomenology's* introduction, the basic problem of philosophy is that it should determine the standard that decides whether something is true or false. It is here claimed that the question of the right standard is the decisive fundamental question of philosophy in general. The question of right standard is also closely related to the question of the right method of thinking, for what is true is what is grasped in thinking according to the right method. With this question of proper standard, however, philosophy seems to encounter a circular problem because it determines that which also decides about its own truth. According to Hegel's basic idea, no philosopher can simply postulate the 'right' method of thinking. This also means that one cannot philosophically determine what it means for something to be true. Instead, according to the idea of *Phenomenology*, the progressive entertainment of various proposals reveals what this standard is. Thus, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel begins in the introduction with a thesis that then becomes, according to my reading, a leading idea of the *Logic*, namely that the method of thinking cannot be given ad hoc, cannot be postulated, cannot be known *a priori*, but finds itself in thinking and can be known only as a result of processes of thought.³¹

Furthermore, there is another thing that is surprising in the *Phenomenology*. It seems that the *Phenomenology* never answers the initial question of the right standard. Not only do the scenarios become ever more complex, the candidates for the scale ever more difficult to identify, but it also seems to be more about a *practice* of finding the truth than about a scale for truth. This surprising circumstance also becomes understandable if one follows my thesis that the standard for truth for Hegel is not a certain assumption regarding content. It is not, for example, a catalogue of other categories, comparable to those articulated by Aristotle and Kant, which decides on the truth of a statement. According to Hegel, something proves its truth when it is classified and related to everything else. This classification must refer to the context of the statement and always also to already established procedures and operations. As has already become clear, Hegel explains the core structure of this activity of embedding in the *Logic*. The activity itself, however, is what philosophers and human beings have always done in thinking; it is what philosophies have already done, only viewed in a new light. The qualitative leap then consists in philosophy recognizing itself as a method.

Encyclopaedia

The introduction to his system of philosophy in the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* (3rd edition; §§1–18) forms one of the passages in which Hegel says in more detail what he understands philosophy to be. It is there said:

The architect of this work of millennia, however, is the one living spirit whose thinking nature it is to become conscious of *what it is*, and, in having thus become an object, to be at the same time already elevated above it and to be in itself a higher stage ... The latest philosophy, chronologically speaking, is the result of all those that precede It and must therefore contain the principles of all of them.

(EL, §13)³²

This is an ambiguous passage. Talk of this *one spirit* consciously grasping itself suggests the teleological interpretation. It also suggests this teleological variant in a certain theological reading, according to which something divine creates the world and finally recognizes itself in man, whereby this comprehension also takes place again in history and comes to an end in philosophy. To me, these interpretations, as explained above, seem problematic despite their proximity to the text. According to my reading, Hegel here uses images for how philosophical thought recognizes itself as a method in Hegel's time. These are traditional (also religious) images with which man partly becomes aware of the fact that thinking is creative, is self-relating and is, in the end, an understanding of itself in the way I have spelled out vis-à-vis the *Logic*.

It also seems clear to me here that if Hegel sees his basic point to lie in the fact that philosophy is a method, but that it must first recognize itself as such, then it is understandable why we may speak of different philosophies and nevertheless claim that there is one philosophical development and one philosophy *qua* science. If one views them as historically external from one another, Spinoza and Leibniz seem to present two mutually exclusive philosophies, but from a perspective informed by an insight into philosophy as method, they can be regarded as a philosophy of the development of logical principles and the increasing exhaustion of certain conceptual definitions of the world. Under 'philosophy', one can understand both: on the one hand, the different philosophies that try to set standards for knowledge in historical times. On the other hand, one can also understand under 'philosophy' the one science, which sees these historical proposals as parts of a comprehensive logical determination of objects according to method. Even if philosophies and philosophy can be distinguished here, they are nevertheless the same to the extent that philosophy as science does not prescribe any new content, but understands the 'old' only in a certain way anew.

By seeing the historical in the development as a whole and understanding it in logical developmental contexts, philosophy somehow overcomes the temporal *qua* temporal.

In this sense, Hegel says after the just quoted statements in §14: 'The same development of thinking that is portrayed in the history of philosophy is also portrayed in philosophy itself, only freed from its historical externality, *purely in the element of*

thinking' (EL, §14). Hegel's *Logic* represents such thinking conducted purely in the element of thinking.

What Hegel says at the end of the *Encyclopaedia* (§573), when he comes back to the question of what philosophy is, also fits with this understanding of philosophy:

Philosophy ... This cognition is thus the recognition of this content and its form, and liberation from the one-sidedness of the forms and the elevation of them into the absolute form, which determines itself to the content and remains identical with the content, and is in this respect the cognition of that necessity that is in and for itself. This movement, which philosophy is, finds itself already accomplished, when at the conclusion it grasps its own concept, i.e. only looks back on its knowledge.

(EPM, §573)³³

It can be emphasized in this quote that (1) the *one* philosophy is not attributing new content but is a recognition of the content of the history of philosophy and that (2) its own content is the method of these thoughts that can be spelled out logically. Philosophy is in this sense thinking as rethinking and metaphilosophy.

Eternal truths of philosophy?

It is well known that Hegel says that philosophy is 'its time apprehended in thoughts'. This means that philosophy, first of all, always refers to the temporal, second, recognizes something temporal in a certain way and, third, even consists only in doing so. Of course, this close relationship to the temporal does not mean that philosophy itself only knows time-dependent truths. Philosophy is about referring to temporal things and events in such a way that their non-temporal structure is uncovered, their embedding in the temporal seen through and their temporality understood.

It is not an extravagant view that philosophy has to do with the temporal in such a way that it is not or not only concerned with the temporal. When Descartes asks what the essence of wax is, he asks what lasts or even what essence does not change at all. It is not clear at first in these conceptions why statements about being itself are not again time-dependent utterances. This seems incomprehensible, not only theoretically so. In fact, the replacement of one philosophy by the next shows that a *de facto* time-dependence holds. Philosophers often react to this situation in such a way that they establish a new method for measuring what belongs to the one philosophical system. But it seems that these proposals on method are subject to the same fate, and disputes must be continued at this level.

In this chapter I have argued that the point of Hegel's philosophy is that he does not make any new claim about contents, but only about method. At issue is no truth about whatever is as such absolute, for it is rather the method that is absolute. The method is absolute because it turns out to rely on nothing other than the internal force of its own conceptual movement. Furthermore, Hegel does not establish the method as his own invention, but introduces it in another way: philosophy has come in its development to a point where we can recognize that the objectivity of thought is the product of

thinking. In philosophy, we therefore consider philosophy's development. This opens up to the method as one that was the (unrecognized) method of philosophies. This insight in the method of philosophy itself changes the situation with respect to truth. With this method, we can claim true assertions. These true assertions concern all fundamental issues that philosophy has dealt with in its development – including the question of correct logical principles. Could philosophers before this insight into method make true assertions? In Hegel's sense, one can say: they could and they could not. On the one hand, as I spelled out, for Hegel part of truth is that it is clear what truth is. This is only now – with the method – the case. On the other hand, with this method, even the assertions of earlier positions can turn out to be true. They just have to be brought into the context of their time – which is also true for Hegel's own assertions. The method makes this dependence transparent in a way that grants the assertions full truth. It is this background that makes it understandable in which sense Hegel says that all is true only by virtue of the absolute idea or method. As he puts it: 'nothing is conceived and known in its truth unless *completely subjugated to the method*' (SL, 737).

But what does this more concretely mean? Can Hegel, for example, claim that what he says about the state is a philosophical truth in the sense that other concepts of a state cannot come to occupy this role in the future? Can he claim that no person who does not live in a state can be fully free? I am going to discuss what this means with respect to the concrete case of the state.

The thesis claimed by Hegel is that a certain institutional form of life best guarantees our modern freedom. This might be false but as a claim concerning truth it seems relatively unproblematic because it is only about the relation of our time-related self-understanding and a given historical situation. However, it also seems to be part of the story that the concepts 'state' and 'freedom' have a history and are parts of a development and that this development allows the claim that they are now somehow *fully* developed. This idea of full development is crucial.

Full development means that it is now developed in all aspects. Freedom is, for example, for all individuals in all aspects of their life principally developed (although maybe not existing, i.e. maybe not all individuals are *de facto* free, etc.). This also has to do with the idea that life and living are fully developed, such that the modern person realizes her/his freedom within different domains. That has to do with many other aspects of development. One of these concerns once more method: the person in Hegel's time is able to be free by virtue of the knowledge about method. He/she knows that there is nothing other than thinking that leads to objectivity. He/she knows that reality is in correspondence with his/her thinking (even if it sometimes seems to be different), and for this reason he/she realizes his/her thoughts in life. But he/she also knows that he/she cannot do all of this alone, but in a community, which in turn must be organized accordingly. Concerning the question of development, the idea seems to go in the following direction: all these developments (of freedom and political things) hang together with the development of thinking. The development of thinking, however, reaches a turning point in Hegel's time because it recognizes itself. This kind of self-cognition somehow completes the development of thinking and therefore all other substantial developments.

Note that nevertheless much could happen historically speaking. The thesis discussed here does not imply an end of history, but an end of substantial insights learned through history, not an end of philosophy, but an end in the sense that the fundamental questions are answered – which, for example, Kant also claimed on behalf of his philosophy.³⁴ Hegel is not the first to claim that his own philosophy presents a turning point, but his claims are more general and more sophisticated because in his conception knowledge, acting, history and philosophy are so closely related.

It is still not yet convincing, however, to claim that self-recognition leads to the development's completion. Why should the idea of freedom not again change, for example, with technical progress? This might change our thinking as well, but then there would be no reason to say that the development has been completed. We need something stronger to explain why self-cognition leads to completion.

At this point, we can return to the above-mentioned readings concerning the ongoing character of philosophy in the future and of the (open or teleological) character of Hegel's philosophy. For in view of the fact that the thesis of philosophy as self-knowledge is not sufficient to justify that there can be no essentially new developments, one can react differently here.

Firstly, one can try to give a stronger argument for the development's completion. It can be said that, due to an inherent aim, the development has proceeded as it has proceeded. The aim is the end of the development that structures the whole development. This can be claimed even if the aim could not be anticipated during the process and turns out only in the end to have been there all along. The aim could, for example, be the realization of freedom or the self-knowledge of spirit that realizes itself.

Secondly, one can argue that the claim that the development is complete has to be understood in another way than meaning that there is no open future. This reading maintains that Hegel thinks that the future is open and that his own position is revisable with respect to content claims. According to my considerations, this could be spelled out in the following way: Hegel only wants to make metaphilosophical statements. He wants to make claims such as: there is a strong dependence between method and truth, and philosophy has become aware of its own fundament – which is nothing given but the result of the movement of our thinking. The development's completeness hence lies at a metaphilosophical level: from now on, philosophy (if it does not lose this insight) will have a different self-understanding than before. The self-understanding will imply that philosophy is always also metaphilosophy. With regard to the metaphilosophical self-relation there is no elevation possible and in this sense the development is complete.

I understand my reading as a third option. According to it, the development comes to an end because of three claims: Firstly, self-cognition means also cognition of the absolute method of thinking. In this way, self-cognition does not only imply self-relation but also provides truth and a system of knowledge. This is why I think that the second reading is too weak. For Hegel, metaphilosophy is not something that can be separated from philosophy, as this proposal (in my version) seems to suggest.³⁵ Secondly, in the development, it turned out that there is a strong correlation between thinking and other (political and social) developments.³⁶ This correlation is not suspect,

as it can be learned from experience that our realization in all areas depends on how we realize the correlation in thinking and vice versa. These relations are also responsible for the fact that the meaning of fundamental concepts is not contingent. The third claim refers to the self-standing conceptual whole that is generated by our thinking. Objectivity is the result of thinking, but this totally developed object is not contingent. Rather, all that can be said hangs rationally together and all of its differentiations must be progressively made and then spelled out – as the character of ‘life’ is spelled out according to this progress. Also, ‘state’ (in a further progress that takes into account human beings) has to be spelled out according to this dynamic. It is logical structure that leads to completeness.

My proposal may first seem to be in favour of the teleological reading. However, the teleological reading does not really fit with my interpretation, for it is decisive that objectivity comes about only through the development of conceptual principles, and this results in a sudden turning point that alters the whole situation. It alters it in such a way that renders it ambiguous with respect to teleology: in its development, it always looked *as if* there had to be an aim, but all of this – in fact the idea of teleology itself – is abandoned at the turning point. The process was not purposeful, but thinking made it what it is. Therefore, it seems to me that talk about teleology does not fit here. One could, of course, say that this process can be called aim-oriented, although the aim itself is *completely* part of the development. ‘Completely’ means that the aim and structure of such progress not only reveal themselves only at the end but also are really only the result of the development.³⁷ The development of conceptual principles towards objectivity is not purposefully guided by the aim of self-cognition (or other aims). The knowledge of this process – self-knowledge in philosophy – is not that which guides the process, it is only that into which this process flows (like a circle). This could still be called ‘teleological’, and Hegel also suggests this, for example, by asserting the same content for religion and philosophy, etc. But the meaning of ‘teleology’ is quite different from the usual one of development towards a goal. Therefore, the theological interpretation also seems deficient to me.³⁸

Coming back to the question of whether it can be that the idea of freedom again changes – for example, with technical progress – we can answer this as follows (and differently than the teleological interpretation): if our thinking changed with respect to the fundamental questions such that we would not have the same understanding of time, space, movement, life and so on, then Hegel’s concept of freedom would no longer be the same as well. But for this, the world would have to also really be different. Especially given my third claim about the self-standing object, it is also clear that differentiations beyond those already spelled out are not possible within the same logical framework. Thus, if our concepts such as ‘life’ and ‘time’ change, nothing would stay stable. If this were to be happen, then it would be an open question whether we could establish new standards of objectivity and, with them, if we could reconstruct a new development towards an again new and fruitful concept of freedom and the state. But this cannot be anticipated with our current thinking. Thus, on the basis of our current thinking – which is objective – and our current concepts – which really structure the world – there can also be no essentially new developments in the areas covered by Hegel’s system. But one may suppose that many things have indeed

fundamentally changed since Hegel's time and that our digital world will change them even more. According to my reading, Hegel himself would have to say, then, that philosophy has urgent new tasks. It would be anything but clear to him that we will once again succeed in giving ourselves a uniform and meaningful perspective on life.³⁹

Notes

- 1 It is difficult to say when the development exactly took place. It is connected with the fact that Hegel modifies the role of intuition after the *Differenzschrift*. This is already done in 1804–1805. See Baum (1986: esp. 236–260).
- 2 Compare EL §13 and GW18, 101.
- 3 Another option would be that philosophical truths can still be discovered and forgotten and rediscovered. As far as I see this would also presuppose unchangeable truths, which I deny for Hegel in what follows.
- 4 It must be remembered, however, that even for Kant these non-revisable sentences are formal sentences and not simply sentences of a certain content.
- 5 He argues for this prominently in 'Force and Understanding', see Emundts (2012: 284–300).
- 6 As will turn out, I agree with this proposal but in a version that is not teleological.
- 7 Cf. Siep (2018: 661).
- 8 This interpretation has a long, prominent history. For a discussion see, for example, Halbig (2004: 44).
- 9 Concerning this question, Hegel's famous sentence from the *Phenomenology* that claims that substance is essentially to be understood as subject is ambiguous. The arc of the *Logic* (towards a subjective logic and then from there onwards to objectivity) better tells what the idea with respect to essentialism is.
- 10 Cf. Emundts (2018).
- 11 Kreines (2017) agrees that it is about the absoluteness of thinking, but following his interpretation this thinking is so little bound to the human subject that from here a theological reading becomes more realistic. Ng (2020: 289) also holds the thesis that the absoluteness means nothing more than that Hegel claims there is no 'outside', no thing in itself.
- 12 In various essays, Sally Sedgwick (2017, 2018, 2021) has recently attempted to defend the thesis of the openness of the future. She does this, for example (Sedgwick 2017), by proving that Hegel assumes the historical conditionality of (his own) thinking. Stekeler-Weithofer (1992: 390, 407) can also be seen as arguing on behalf of a thesis for an open future; according to his reading, the concept of truth is always already guided by interests. As far as I can see, these interpretations contradict the teleological reading, but not my reading. I will present the thesis of the open future below in a different variant. In my variant the future is open but not in the same way as before Hegel's time.
- 13 For example, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*.
- 14 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 15 'The universal character of its form – that is, *method*' – this, according to Hegel, is still to be considered (see SL, 736).
- 16 See Illetterati (2014). Horstmann (2017) argued that objectivity must be a conceptual element because concepts structure our world. He somehow takes the reality of

reason as Hegel's starting point. My idea goes in another direction: it *turns out* that concepts are necessary for as well as able to establish objectivity.

- 17 It is one of Hegel's ideas that concepts have a 'true' meaning, but understanding this idea again depends on understanding Hegel's concept of truth. Nevertheless, it is easier to explain what happens in the chapter 'Idea' if one already works with this idea of the meaning that concepts have.
- 18 Note that this is a very Kantian conception.
- 19 By this, I am not claiming that reality is nothing but this process. I only claim that reality implies this process and that this process is constitutive for something to be real.
- 20 Hegel repeatedly exaggerates this thesis on the relationship between thought and life by saying, for example, that the genus-process (which is in life) is 'the becoming of the concept that relates itself to itself, of the concept that exists for itself, universal and free' (SL, 679). Similarly, he later says that the thinking subject 'in its other has its own objectivity for its subject matter' (SL, 735).
- 21 The cognition of this progress is '*all truth*' and 'it is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy' (SL, 735).
- 22 The *Logic* is 'Realisation' but 'confined within the same sphere' (SL, 752), the *Realphilosophie* is the same development in another sphere.
- 23 Last but not least, the method has often been mocked, see Schelling ([1827] 1927: 205). The basic idea of indeterminacy, as I sketch it here, can be found in Fulda (1989: 60), summarizing: 'Die ganze Dialektik lässt sich als ein Verfahren solcher Einschränkungen von Vagheit charakterisieren.' For more recent discussions, see Maybee (2016).
- 24 For the concept 'measure', see Houlgate (2014).
- 25 Emundts (2012: 157). This also means that concepts are not 'a priori' but always generated and enriched by what there is. Contrary to this, Ng (2020: 7 – as many others) presupposes for her reconstruction of Hegel's method (in which she makes a lot of points that fit to my interpretation) that he wants to establish *a priori* concepts.
- 26 Hegel does not say that the method is proven but that it becomes something '*deduced and proved*' (SL, 748). Hegel also describes the method as 'the *retrogressive grounding* of the beginning and the *progressive further determination* of it' (SL, 750).
- 27 This does not mean that there is 'reality' as opposed to concepts, but that the development of concepts can be (in the *Logic*) presented in a pure form of thinking. See fn. 20.
- 28 Theunissen (1994) has read the first two books of the *Logic* as a critique of traditional logic. Following my interpretation – that seems to me similar to Theunissen's (see 1994: 63–64) – it should be emphasized here that it is only a critique of the self-understanding of those who separately consider these parts of logic to be complete or valid. The principles are only valid when the manner in which their validity comes about is recognized. This happens in the last book of the *Logic*.
- 29 This is also made explicit at the end of the *Logic* (see SL, 750).
- 30 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Pinkard and Baur's translation (2018).
- 31 Theunissen (2014) has shown how the plurality of different philosophies can be seen as starting point for Hegel's philosophy as a kind of metaphilosophy.
- 32 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.

- 33 The *Philosophy of Mind* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (2007).
- 34 Kant claims that his transcendental logic is the method that now allows the building of a system of philosophy. His philosophy is meant to have given the foundation for this in all areas.
- 35 It should be clear that according to my reading, philosophy leads to metaphilosophy and metaphilosophy renders philosophy a system that can make true fundamental assertions.
- 36 If I see this correctly, Martin (2012: ch. 4) represents the opposite thesis, since he would assume a completeness of logic, but not of the developments of institutions, etc.
- 37 This is an important difference from teleological readings: for Halbig, for example, it is clear that there is a goal of development, but as long as the development is not complete, it is not clear what that goal is – one cannot anticipate the goal without experience (2004: 44).
- 38 There are two main passages in the chapter on idea that can be cited here: those on personality and those on the original word. The passage on personality can be related very well to the human being as a spiritual and social being (in contrast to nature and the individual). The second passage on 'Wort' is related to the character of logic, which does not include real development, but only logical development, and in which 'utterance' in the sense of 'realization' occurs only linguistically. For a theological interpretation of the last part of the *Logic*, see Siep (2018); against it, see Pippin (2018: 317–318).
- 39 I would like to thank Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Karen Koch, James Kreines and Sally Sedgwick for their comments on this chapter. Thanks are also due to Daniel Carranza for his careful reading.

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The History of Philosophy as the Progress of Philosophy: Hegel's Metaphilosophical Perspective

Giulia La Rocca

The question of the history of philosophy

Our philosophy essentially came into existence only in connection with the previous ones.

—Hegel (VGPE1, 8–9)

The STUDY of the history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself.

—Hegel (VGPE1, 27–28)¹

These Hegelian statements express an inherent link between philosophical activity and the study of the history of philosophy – a connection that, if the two statements are understood according to their naïve but most widespread interpretations, seems contradictory. Indeed, philosophy's reference to tradition seemingly contradicts the autonomy of thought that guides rational investigation; moreover, it would seem to be nonsensical to study most past philosophies, which once overcome by more evolved theories, would ostensibly make no contribution to the exposition of truth. Yet, philosophy is clearly unable to avoid referring to its past: as has been widely acknowledged, unlike the natural sciences it has a close relationship with its history (cf. Rée 1978: 1–2; Sorell 2005: 56–57; Williamson 2018: 99–100). Indeed, philosophy is unique in that it requires continuous, direct reading of texts from the past, while achievements over time in the natural sciences can easily be drawn from summaries. The relationship between philosophy and its history would thus seem to be bound up in a paradox: contradictory and necessary at the same time.

This paradox has accompanied the history of analytic philosophy. From its origins, analytic philosophy has distanced itself from earlier philosophical traditions and postulated a sharp separation between the rational search for truth and study of the philosophical theories of the past, positing the former as independent from and more relevant than the latter (see Rée, Westboy and Ayers 1978; Sorell and Rogers 2005). In this context, studying the history of philosophy has been considered useful for philosophy only if the theories of the great philosophers of the past – addressed as

contemporaries – could become a resource from which to draw present-day ideas, arguments or solutions. Bertrand Russell is a useful example: in the preface to the first edition of his book on Leibniz, Russell notes ‘a purely philosophical attitude towards previous philosophers – an attitude in which, without regard to dates or influences, we seek simply to discover what are the great types of possible philosophies, and guide ourselves in the search by investigating the systems advocated by the great philosophers of the past’ (Russell [1900] 1937: ix–xii). Hence the following dilemma:

Either we read the philosophies of the past so as to make them relevant to our contemporary problems and enterprises, transmuting them as far as possible into what they would have been if they were part of present-day philosophy, and minimizing or ignoring or even on occasion misrepresenting that which refuses such transmutation because it is inextricably bound up with that in the past which makes it radically different from present-day philosophy; or instead we take great care to read them in their own terms, carefully preserving their idiosyncratic and specific character, so that they cannot emerge into the present except as a set of museum pieces.

(MacIntyre 1984: 31; see Rorty 1984)

As Catherine Wilson notes, the study of the history of philosophy was considered appropriate by this framework only for those lacking the talent and creativity to conduct proper philosophical research – despite recognition that this belief was clearly false (Wilson 2005: 66–67). Thus, while seemingly having resolved the paradox, analytic scholars nonetheless have felt the need to rethink the relationship between philosophy and its history (see Rée 1978; MacIntyre 1984; Rorty 1984). Indeed, though philosophy and the history of philosophy are taken by most working in the analytic tradition as two separate disciplines, it has nevertheless been considered necessary to account for their mutual relationship. For instance, the question has been raised whether historical study of past theories – which is to say the study that consciously attends to the context and historical distance between interpreter and text – is useful for philosophical investigation, namely whether it can help it progress. This problem has given rise to a lively metaphilosophical debate on the relationship between philosophy and its history, not limited to analytic scholars but also involving the general English-speaking public. The orientation of this discussion is evidenced by the terminology used even in the titles of related articles and books: *Using the History of Philosophy* (Williamson 2018: 98), *Is the History of Philosophy Good for Philosophy?* (Wilson 2005: 61) and *Why Should Analytic Philosophers Do History of Philosophy?* (Cottingham 2005: 25). Another excellent example of the metaphilosophical hue of this debate is the distinction recently proposed by Nigel Warburton between two approaches to philosophy: a thematic one, which deals with proper philosophical problems, and a historical one, which concerns the study of the ‘contributions of ... philosophers in chronological order’ (Warburton 2004: 2). Philosophical research, Warburton goes on to argue, includes the study of the history of philosophy because, without awareness of the arguments and errors of the past, we would have no hope of contributing to the existing body of knowledge. Thus understood, philosophy can nevertheless be considered independently from its history because its questions arise spontaneously

from human nature, that is, from the rational faculty that characterizes us as human beings and which is not a consequence of history.

Now we should ask: do the Hegelian statements quoted above have a place within this framework? This chapter aims to show the contemporary relevance of Hegel's metaphilosophical perspective on the history of philosophy. By questioning the assumptions producing the purported paradoxical relation between philosophy and its history, Hegel allows us to understand the intrinsic link between the two. If, as Hegel invites us, we think of the autonomy of philosophical thought and its search for truth in a radical way, we find that only by referring to its own history can philosophy possibly both realize itself as such and open itself to progress. Hegel's philosophy – partly in accordance with some of the solutions proposed in the current analytic debate, partly with a critical spirit towards that debate's presuppositions – advances an approach that constitutes a distinct contribution.

In what follows, I will examine the issues at stake in the so-called paradox of the history of philosophy: the relationship between the autonomy of thought and tradition and the truth value of theories of the past. Afterwards, I will try to address why, according to Hegel, philosophy cannot ignore its own past – and what this insight might offer the lively contemporary debate.

Tradition and philosophical research

To say 'thus spake the Master' is unworthy of a philosopher; better to trust our own native wit.

—Francisco Sanchez, *Quod Nihil Scitur* (Cottingham 2005: 25)

Although he begins with this quotation from Francisco Sanchez's *Quod Nihil Scitur* (1581), which seems to affirm the paradoxical character of the history of philosophy, John Cottingham goes on to challenge that standpoint. If the proper task of philosophy is autonomous thought – if, as Socrates used to say, it must 'follow the argument where it leads' by virtue of reason alone – then 'individual rational inquiry' should require independence from external authoritative sources and thus from any content coming from the philosophical tradition (Cottingham 2005: 26). Only such inquiry would therefore seem to be 'authentic philosophizing', displaying an 'active, critical, and inquiring spirit'; reference to tradition, to the authority of the doctrines of the past, instead, would be for 'slavish expositors' (Cottingham 2005: 26). From this perspective, we might say that 'philosophy, by definition, challenges its history' (Gueroult 1969: 570). Since the history of philosophy takes up 'doctrines, notions, and concepts from the outside, as facts', it would seem to be 'the negation of philosophy which, far from being the passive acceptance of ready-made solutions or the empirical knowledge of external giver, is knowledge through internal reason' (Gueroult 1969: 570). This division between knowledge acquired from tradition and knowledge proven by reason recalls Kant's distinction between historical cognition (*ex datis*) and cognition based on rational principles (*ex principiis*) – according to Kant, only the latter constitute proper philosophical knowledge (Kant [1787] 1998: 693, A 836, B 864).

Obviously, Cottingham aims to be provocative and to challenge the thesis that philosophy could do without its history. By aiming 'at understanding' theories – namely, their arguments and principles – and critically reflecting on them, could not the study of the history of philosophy aid philosophical research? (Cottingham 2005: 27). In fact, scrutiny of the past can sharpen our critical sense: reading the texts of past philosophers can produce an alienating experience of culture clash between their assumptions and ours. We consequently might stop considering our assumptions as self-evident, and therefore subject them to the scrutiny of reason. This argument, which recurs in the analytic debate, is generally recognized as a point in favour of the usefulness of the history of philosophy.² It appears in 1994 in a contribution by Bernard Williams, who referencing Nietzsche (1874), proposes using the philosophical materials at our disposal together with their historical reconstructions to obtain anachronistic perspectives on our problems – or rather, to locate in the philosophical forms of the past, or forms from them, structures that are sufficiently unfamiliar (strange) to both the present and our conceptions of the tradition (and the materials we receive from it) as to call them into question. The origin of this argument actually can be traced back further, to the philosopher best known for wanting a sharp break with the authority of tradition: Descartes (cf. Garber 2001: 22). According to the metaphor contained in Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (Descartes [1637] 2003: 6), discoursing with past thinkers is like travelling: learning about cultural differences, broadening one's horizons.

Studying the history of philosophy *may* therefore be useful to philosophical research, but – as Cottingham asks (2005: 27) – why *should* philosophy make reference to its past? Isn't there any other, less costly method for engaging in critical thought? To what extent is a relationship with the history of philosophy *necessary* for philosophy?

In other words, beyond the possibility of experiencing difference or broadening one's horizons – namely, beyond the question of the usefulness of the history of philosophy for philosophical research – is the history of philosophy really necessary to conduct what is essentially the work of reason alone? In what follows, I will attempt to show that a philosophical system can be built only in reference to, and through the demolition of, its own past. In other words, philosophy is, as Charles Taylor noted (also in reference to Hegel), 'a creative destruction of the past' (Taylor 1984: 20).

Tradition and change

The legacy of the tradition

If the metaphilosophical debate about the history of philosophy can find a possible interlocutor in Hegel, an additional question emerges: How might Hegel help us solve the paradox between philosophy and its history? To address this question, we must take a step back and try to understand first Hegel's general metaphilosophical position – including its attitude towards common-sense beliefs – and second what it means for philosophy to be 'creative destruction' of the past and inherited beliefs.

First, on the general nature of philosophy, Hegel agrees with Sanchez's maxim quoted above: knowledge cannot be justified based on its conformity to authority. For Hegel, philosophy is the autonomous knowledge grasped by reason; it cannot accept contents given to it from external authoritative sources. Since Hegel finds this characteristic radically distinctive of philosophy, he requires philosophy to be free from presuppositions (*voraussetzungslos*) (see Maker 1994; Houlgate 2006: 24–71; Hentrup 2020). Precisely because it cannot be subject to any knowledge it cannot justify, philosophy – as knowledge produced by reason – cannot begin from a presupposition about either its object or its method and thus cannot even define itself: 'Logic, therefore, cannot say what it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole treatment' (SL, 27; WdL, GW21, 23).³

Thus, if the philosopher can heed reason alone, he/she must renounce even the personal strains of his/her own thought, those inflected by her individual will or opinion.

Following one's conviction is, of course, more than giving oneself over to the authority; but changing an opinion accepted on authority into an opinion held out of personal conviction, does not necessarily alter the content of the opinion, or replace error with truth. The only difference between being caught up in a system of opinions and prejudices based on personal conviction, and being caught up in one based on the authority of others, lies in the added conceit that is innate in the former position.

(PS, 56; PhG, GW9, 50)⁴

For Hegel, such autonomy is certainly a necessary condition of genuine philosophical thought. It includes rejection of any influence other than that of reason, including the authority of others and that which the I, as an individual, claims to have over its thought.⁵ Such an account of philosophy implies freedom from assumptions – from everything that is otherwise accepted in its immediacy and not further justified, regardless of whether it originates from an external institution, tradition or one's own mind. Thinking autonomously can be called thinking *for oneself* not because the individual is a source of legitimacy as such or a criterion of truth but because all beings endowed with reason must be able to exercise this authority and, vice versa, knowledge – even if historically already subjected to critical scrutiny – is rational only to the extent that the individual evaluates for itself the thought process legitimizing it. By contrast, '*Dogmatism* as a way of thinking, whether in ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else but the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known' (PS, 23; PhG, GW9, 31).

Still, like analytic scholars,⁶ Hegel maintains that philosophy starts from common sense, moves beyond it and then returns to it to test its cognitive results. '[Philosophy]'s content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain of the living spirit, and 'its accord with actuality and experience is necessary' (EL, §6).⁷ Hegel, however, goes further, showing that this movement of philosophical thought determines its inherently historical character. That philosophy has common sense as its starting point means it draws its material from beliefs and

theories that already define the way of thinking in a given era. This material constitutes the spiritual world that thought encounters (*vorhandene geistige Welt*) – our cultural legacy (*Erbschaft*), produced and transmitted from the past (*Vorwelt*) – and it serves as the premise (*Voraussetzung*, *Vorlage*) from which philosophy begins its work (VGPE1, 6–8; WdL, GW21, 10).

That philosophy begins from this *Voraussetzung* might seem to undermine Hegel's demand that philosophy be a presuppositionless science. However, as I will try to show, freedom from presuppositions (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*) does not imply an initial absence of preconditions but the capacity to not depend on them. Indeed, the *Voraussetzungslosigkeit* should be understood as the activity, process and product of philosophy: philosophy is the activity by which thought frees itself from its presuppositions.

Thought is therefore familiar with its spiritual world, which it finds immediate and natural – its 'inorganic nature' (PS, 16; PhG, GW9, 25). Still, according to one of Hegel's most famous expressions, precisely because thought feels at home in common sense, common sense is 'familiar' (*bekannt*) to it but not 'cognitively understood' (*erkannt*) (PS, 18; PhG, GW9, 26; SL, 13; WdL, GW21, 12). Furthermore, specifically because of this familiarity (*Bekanntschaft*), thought has no interest in or curiosity about this content. The content of common sense is therefore what Hegel calls representation (*Vorstellung*): content that is not rationally justified. This material is immediately available to thought only in the form of judgement, namely thought attributes qualities to its object. Yet, for Hegel, it is not *judgement* but rather *sylogism* that produces knowledge, in that syllogism reconstructs the rational connections that justify a judgement (PS, 38–41; PhG, GW9, 44–46). Exposing this logical syllogistic connection is the task of philosophy, which goes beyond common sense to translate 'the genuine *content* of our consciousness ... into the form of thought' (EL, §5; see Illetterati 2009). Philosophy provides the rational exposition, the syllogism whose conclusion is the content of common sense. In this sense, presupposition is sublated: since its content has been justified as the result of a rational process, it is no longer an arbitrary or dogmatic assumption.

In the case of the philosophical tradition, the material at hand for common sense is not an ensemble of naïve beliefs but rather of rational systems. However, as soon as tradition is formed, our relation to it changes: it becomes fixed as the inorganic nature of thought – something thought finds before itself as immediately given, and which has lost its justification (in Hegel's words: the process, or mediation, leading to the formation of the tradition has been 'forgotten'). As Charles Taylor stressed, for Hegel, 'in order to undo the forgetting, we have to articulate for ourselves how it happened, to become aware of the way a picture slid from the status of discovery to that inarticulate assumption, a fact too obvious to mention' (Taylor 1984: 21). In other words: 'we have to formulate what is now unsaid' (Taylor 1984: 24).

This means that freeing ourselves from assumptions that otherwise would be unjustified, and which keep us in a condition of only apparent autonomy, requires practising a philosophy that retraces the entire history of thought for ourselves (though this path is made less arduous by the fact that the road has already been paved by the history of thought). 'The single individual must also pass through the formative stages of universal Spirit so far as their content is concerned, but as shapes which Spirit has

already left behind' (PS, 16; PhG, GW9, 25). The path of the individual 'consists in acquiring what thus lies at hand, devouring his inorganic nature, and taking possession of it for himself' (PS, 16; PhG, GW9, 25).⁸

The historical path of philosophy is therefore also the development of thought. The production of thought determinations from the point of view of pure thought alone is philosophy as Logic; in so far as this development happens over time, it is the history of philosophy (VGPE1, 26).

It is therefore now clear why for Hegel the study of the history of philosophy cannot consist in reading handbooks that summarize the theses of philosophers of the past: acquiring a doctrine of the past implies not only learning its thesis and content but also understanding the reason on which it is grounded. Is there a risk that such a reconstruction might still become merely passive acceptance of tradition? If this were the case, philosophy would be reduced to its past, without any possibility of creative demolition or progress. Yet, Hegel argues that it is precisely in the process of acquiring the legacy of tradition that philosophy reshapes and develops itself.

The reworking of tradition

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel stresses the creative power of a philosophy that confronts tradition, by claiming that, in assimilating tradition, philosophy reworks it, and thus gives it a new shape.

This is also our and every age's position and activity, to *grasp* the science that *exists* [*vorhanden ist*] and to shape ourselves on it [*sich ihr anzubilden*], and to form it further and raise it to a higher standpoint; by making it *our own*, we make *something of ours* from it, against what it was before.

(VGPE1, 8)

At work in this process of reworking and transforming is the *creative* demolition that generates new forms of philosophy.⁹ Relatedly, the history of philosophy is '*work, activity* against what exists, its *transformation*' (VGPE1, 39).¹⁰ In fact, according to Hegel, every philosophical system developed in history has expressed a particular truth determination because each system has apprehended truth from the determined and limited perspective in which it was historically elaborated. Therefore, every system is a *determinate and determined, finite* part of the truth, separate from the other parts: 'as a particular philosophy, each is not the whole Idea, but only a member of the whole' (VGPE1, 154).¹¹ The particular determination of each philosophical system, that which shapes it, thus also constitutes its limit: that which makes it one-sided and negates its claim of absoluteness.¹² Since no system is absolute, no system can totally justify itself; each inevitably contains assumptions for which it can exhibit no reason. The system is consequently called into question. Attempts to reconstruct a system's rational justification, to free it from what is arbitrary and non-rational, create a new system, in which the unjustified presupposition contained in the previous system is transformed into the rational foundation of that arbitrary assumption. The result of this reworking of the old system is thus a new determination: philosophy in a new shape.¹³

What is progress for philosophy?

It is in this sense that the history of philosophy can be conceived of as a creative demolition of the past. Current philosophy is thus inevitably linked to the systems that have preceded it. Yet, what truth value do past philosophies have for the present one, once they have been 'demolished'? Does philosophy, by reworking tradition, merely undergo a process of change over time, or does it constitute progress in the knowledge of truth? In what follows, I will address these questions as they arise in contemporary debates in analytical metaphilosophy, and then consider how Hegel's philosophy can help us resolve them.

The question of progress in philosophy is one of the most debated issues in analytic philosophy, a context that tends to think of progress in philosophy as analogous to scientific progress. 'We should treat the history of philosophy as we treat the history of science. In the latter field, we have no reluctance in saying that we know better than our ancestors what they were talking about,' Richard Rorty says (1984: 49). Timothy Williamson agrees (2018: 130–131): 'Failing to appreciate how much scientific progress consists in building better models,' philosophers often 'fail to ask how much philosophical progress consists in building better models too'.

However, it seems unreasonable to consider the history of philosophy as a progressive, linear increase of knowledge following the model of the natural sciences. As Anthony Kenny (2005: 14) notes,

The major philosophical problems, according to this view, are all still being debated after centuries of discussion, and are no nearer to any definitive resolution. Anyone looking back over the long history of philosophy is bound to wonder: does philosophy get anywhere? Have philosophers, for all their efforts over the centuries, actually learnt anything?

Indeed, the persistence of the same problems across time is generally seen as a major sign of stagnation rather than historical development (Krüger 1984: 84).

The debate over the progress of philosophy became very lively following the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962, 1st edition). Kuhn's work, in fact, opened up the possibility of conceiving of progress as non-linear and non-cumulative.¹⁴ This model of scientific advancement has had considerable impact (cf. Wilson 2005: 73–74), and many scholars have wondered whether the history of philosophy too could be described in Kuhnian terms.¹⁵

Yet, whether we assume progress is linear, a continuous correction of theories as they are proven false, or conceive of it as a development of knowledge following Kuhn's theory, in either case the doctrines of the past do not maintain their truth values in the present: they are either false or totally replaced and even incommensurable with new ones. Should we consider progress in philosophy as the affirmation over time of new theories that, proving more appropriate, reveal past ones to be false or at best neutral regarding their truth values? To answer this question, we should address the issue of the truthfulness of a philosophical system.

Are past philosophies true?

If the building of every philosophical system refers to the theories of the past, how should we regard the truth of those theories after they have been discarded? Should the contributions of the philosophical tradition be limited to providing the present with techniques of reasoning, strategies of argumentation and better awareness of past errors and unjustified assumptions? In other words, should we consider past philosophies outside of truth evaluations, as purely instrumental?

Williamson (2018: 99) argues, for example, that 'there is a distinction between putting forward a theory as what some philosopher held and putting it forward as *true*. Scholarly historians of philosophy are usually clear about the difference: they are asking what theory the philosopher held, not what theory is true.' This implies that the 'study of the past' is defined so 'as to exclude any consideration of what is true or good'; in this sense past theories would be philosophies only *de facto* but not *de jure* – with the search for truth reserved for the present (MacIntyre 1984: 39; see Nuzzo 2000: 29).

The history of philosophy would consist of *many different* philosophies, now apparently *outdated*, which have claimed to be knowledge of the *one, eternal* truth; just as those systems have been undermined and surpassed, so will current philosophies and those to come. The historicity of philosophy therefore seems to contain a twofold contradiction: one between the eternity of truth and the transience of systems, and one between the plurality of doctrines and the uniqueness of truth (see Nuzzo 2000, 2003; Jaeschke 2016: 42).

Hegel, in fact, used to commence his courses on the history of philosophy by highlighting precisely this double contradiction, noting that philosophy and history seem completely heterogeneous (cf. VGPE1, 13–14). Indeed, if one is 'knowledge of what is true and therefore eternal and imperishable', the other, 'on the contrary, according to the next representation of it, has to do with what has happened, thus with what is contingent, perishable and past' (VGPE1, 13). A *history* (progression over time) of *philosophy* (exposition of the truth) thus would seem to be impossible. In this sense, as Nuzzo (2000: 28–29) points out, we should speak not of a history of philosophy – namely, a history in which philosophy is the subject – but of a history *towards* philosophy. The achievement of philosophy, or of science, would put an end to this propaedeutic history: true knowledge would be beyond the historical dimension. Past philosophies would not be knowledge of the truth but merely (failed) attempts to grasp the truth. At most, they might be considered increasingly adequate attempts to acquire knowledge, through a process in which each system advances beyond the previous one and renders it useless (see VGPE1, 142).

From this point of view, the history of philosophy could only be 'the store of philosophical opinions as they have arisen in time' or 'a gallery of confusions of the human spirit' (VGPE1, 15). In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel asks rhetorically: 'What could be more useless than to learn a series of mere opinions, what could be more boring?' (VGPE1, 18). According to this view, the history of philosophy would be reduced to 'an interest for *erudition*'; the only way to make sense of such study would be to find usefulness in it (VGPE1, 16).

Hegel rejects such a perspective as deriving from false assumptions about the meaning of truth and history. The ostensible contradiction rests on the assumption that truth, since it is single and unchangeable (otherwise it would be mere opinion), can be expressed properly in only one way and thus all other historical determinations of it are false.¹⁶

The point becomes clearer if compared to the approach from which Hegel takes distance and which we can call the Tennemann model (see VGPE1, 212, 282). Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, a Kantian-oriented scholar and author of a *History of Philosophy* (1798), maintained that the history of philosophy develops as a continuous effort of thought towards the truth. Tennemann argued that the history of any science¹⁷ must be understood as the immanent completion of its systematic knowledge – otherwise there would be no progress (Tennemann 1798: xxv). Accordingly, science should develop architectonically from the systematic idea of totality¹⁸ towards which its finite, limited manifestations aim. ‘The history of a science’, and thus of philosophy (insofar as philosophy aims at true and systematic knowledge), therefore, constitutes ‘the exposition of the efforts [*Bestrebungen*] of science and the gradual development of its formation through them’ (Tennemann 1798: xvii; my translation). As we have seen, this gradual development proposed by Tennemann implies that every manifestation of science is deficient in relation to its idea, which could never be achieved in its perfection. Hegel criticizes how Tennemann, in considering philosophical positions as opinions tending towards truth, is unable to grasp these positions themselves as determinations of truth. According to Hegel, Tennemann’s theory conceives of past philosophies as nothing more than an always failed attempt to get closer to the truth.¹⁹

Yet, how can Hegel, on the contrary, claim simultaneously that the truth is eternal and immutable and that every philosophy, which is historically embedded and differs from all others, is true?

His position rests on the particular account of truth that he elaborates in relation to his demand for the absence of assumptions in philosophy.²⁰ If philosophy cannot presuppose anything, then the only content it can admit is that which thought produces by itself. Pure thought must therefore perform the exercise of abstracting away from all the determinations attributed to it by tradition. For Hegel, thought should notably begin from total indeterminacy and develop only by following its own logical progression – this is the aim of the *Science of Logic*.²¹ In this process, thought sets and gives itself its own reality: it reproduces the rationality of the real and reconstructs its logical genesis; or in other words, it achieves conceptual comprehension of determinations it had before considered ‘inorganic nature’. Truth for Hegel is therefore the ‘concrete concept’ (see WdL, GW12, 250–252): the concept aware of its own reality (with truth being this self-awareness) or – in what for Hegel amounts to the same thing – reality rationally comprehended. If every philosophical system reconstructs the rationality of the real at a given historical moment, and therefore from a determined perspective, then each one expresses a side of the truth, though not its totality. In this sense, every system is false because it is not whole; its claims to be the absolute truth must be negated and reduced to its historical moment while still remaining true (cf. PS, 17–18; PhG, GW9, 25–26, 289–293). Hegel even articulates this in a paradoxical way: ‘It should also be noted that no philosophy has been refuted. And yet all have been refuted’ (VGPE1,

154). But he goes on to explain that 'it is not the principle of philosophy that is refuted, but only this is refuted, that such a principle has absolute, ultimate validity; it is refuted insofar as it is reduced to a moment of the whole' (VGPE1, 154).²²

The process of 'creative demolition', therefore, involves denying the previous system by criticizing its one-sidedness and assumptions while at the same time maintaining its historical determination. From this perspective, the history of philosophy is a process of progressive enrichment and concretization of thought.

At each stage of further determination, the universal elevates the whole mass of its preceding content, not only not losing anything through its dialectical advance, or leaving it behind, but, on the contrary, carrying with itself all it has gained, inwardly enriched and compressed [*immer reicher und concreter*].

(SL, 750; WdL, GW12, 250)

The most recent shape emerging from this forward movement (*Fortbewegung*) is therefore the most concrete and etymologically mature, it is the product of the process that has developed all of its determinations (see VGPE1, 45). In this sense, truth in the history of philosophy lies only in the totality and connection of philosophies, as each past system is an expression of truth from the perspective of its own historical epoch. This is why Hegel calls the history of philosophy a system.²³

Hegel's conception of truth as an organic concept – namely, as a totality of various thought determinations – determines his way of looking at past philosophical systems: taken separately, they cannot claim to be the truth. Only taken as parts of a whole do they express a truth, one which develops over time as thought is freed from its unjustified assumptions.

Conclusion

What then is the meaning of the two Hegelian statements with which we began? How does Hegel understand the inseparability of philosophy and the history of philosophy?

On the one hand, he states that 'our philosophy essentially came into existence only in connection with the previous ones' because it is only in the process of critically reworking tradition that novelty can emerge (VGPE1, 8–9). Pure philosophizing, the rational search for truth abstracted from the historical concreteness of this search, is not possible. The history of philosophy therefore is not separate from philosophy because philosophy is only possible in the history of philosophy. On the other hand, 'the STUDY of the history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself' (VGPE1, 27–28) because philosophy, in its history, also matures its logical path.

We have therefore seen that for Hegel the history of philosophy is a process of 'creative demolition.' How can this be understood as philosophical *progress*? In the process of 'creative demolition', philosophy progresses as autonomous thought: it is the activity that constantly frees itself from any content that is external to it and untested by reason. Thought is autonomous because, though originating from tradition, it is able to take distance from it – to criticize inherited presuppositions and thus open

up space for a new system whose assumptions are rationally justified. On the other hand, however, this progress can be understood as a constant enrichment of thought only to the extent that thought also maintains an inseparable link to tradition and the legacy of past theories. It is precisely in recognizing these past theories as expressions of a particular determination of the true, without claiming their absolute validity, that thought can emancipate itself from the one-sidedness of a single perspective. This is how, for Hegel, the history of philosophy achieves creation and enrichment through destruction.

By showing that the logical and the historical belong together, Hegel's approach offers some important tools for resolving the paradox of the history of philosophy that has long tormented the analytical debate. What is interesting is that some of the conclusions reached by this debate are compatible with those of Hegel. For instance, the claim that the history of philosophy is a culture shock with the potential to make evident 'assumptions that are deeply embedded, unargued, and even unavowed', namely to shake up presuppositions (Hatfield 2005: 93). Yet, Hegel's perspective also allows us to question the assumptions underlying that debate. Firstly, the assumption of the separateness between philosophy and the history of philosophy that continues to be maintained, if in attenuated form, by some analytical philosophers. This presupposition forces us to think of the relationship between philosophy and its history in an extrinsic way and in terms of the usefulness of the latter for the progress of the former. Secondly, Hegel proposes his own holistic conception of truth, which perhaps can help us better recognize the value of the contributions of past philosophies.

Notes

- 1 All translation in this chapter from VGPE1 are mine. 'Unsere Philosophie [ist] wesentlich nur im Zusammenhang mit vorhergehender zur Existenz gekommen' and 'das STUDIUM der Geschichte der Philosophie [ist] Studium der Philosophie selbst.'
- 2 Cf. Williams (1994), Garber (2001), Cottingham (2005), Hatfield (2005) and Williamson (2018: 106).
- 3 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 4 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Miller's translation.
- 5 Cf. Chiereghin (2011: 20–23), Illetterati (2016) and Miolli (2017). In holding this view, Hegel takes up the Kantian plea for autonomy: according to Kant 'to think for oneself' or 'to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another' renders reason a law unto itself, never passive and never heteronomous; it demands using reason on content before assuming it to be true and not arbitrarily supporting one's own conviction (Kant [1784] 1991: 54; [1790] 2000: 174).
- 6 For one of the most recent contributions in this regard, see Williamson (2018: 6–18).
- 7 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Geraets, Suchting and Harris' translation.
- 8 See Farina (2016); see SL, 12, 17; WdL, GW21, 10, 15: 'The forms of thought are first set out and stored in human *language* ... So much is logic natural to human being, is indeed his very *nature* ... To bring to consciousness this *logical* nature that animates

the spirit, that moves and works within it, this is the task. The broad distinction between instinctive act and act which is intelligent and free is that the latter is performed consciously.'

- 9 Each philosophy comes from a tradition and creates a new tradition (see Nuzzo 2000: 34).
- 10 'Arbeit, Tätigkeit gegen ein Vorhandenes, Umbildung desselben.'
- 11 By 'Idea' Hegel means the truth: 'The idea is the *adequate concept*, the objectively true, or the *true as such*' (SL, 670; WdL, GW12, 173; cf. Miolli 2016: 165–219).
- 12 Cf. 'Jedes Moment faßt die ganze Idee in seiner einseitigen Form auf, hebt sich dieser Einseitigkeit wegen auf - das ist die Dialektik dieser Bestimmung' (VGPE1, 162).
- 13 Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien 1819 und 1820/21*, GW30.1, ed. K. Grotzsch, 227–228, Hamburg: Meiner.
- 14 According to Kuhn, any new scientific theory is formed not through refutation of past errors and increased knowledge but rather by the rearticulation, in a novel paradigm, of the problems that remained unsolved in previous or existing theories. Kuhn's notion of progress suggests that not only would science's explanation of reality change thanks to this new idiom but so would the very reality to which science refers. Moreover, the various paradigms – scientific theories successively following one another in history – would be incommensurable: none would constitute a neutral standard by which to evaluate the truth of the others.
- 15 Krüger (1984), MacIntyre (1984), Rorty (1984) and Cottingham (2005: 29–30); MacIntyre affirms that the history of philosophy, in general, can be conceived on the basis of the Kuhnian theory of the structure of scientific revolutions, but he denies that the substitution of one philosophical system with another one is unjustifiable and that paradigms are incommensurable.
- 16 In this regard, it is telling how Williamson describes his account of philosophy as a dispute amongst different positions. He proposes a series of analogies: 'philosophical discussion as gladiatorial combat', as 'legal disputes', as 'logic games' (Williamson 2018: 20–26). We might note that these are examples in which one side wins the dispute if and only if the other loses. In other words, the truth of one philosophical position implies the falsehood of all the others, because only its statement corresponds to what it is.
- 17 The word 'science' does not refer exclusively to the modern natural sciences but, for Tennemann, includes any true knowledge organized in a systematic form.
- 18 Tennemann makes unequivocal use of the Kantian meaning of idea (*Idee*); cf. Kant ([1787] 1998: 692; B 862; A 834).
- 19 According to Hegel, Tennemann (like Kant) denies that the truth can be known and thus does him injustice (*tut ihm Unrecht*; VGPE1, 123). He sees this as implying philosophy is always nothing more than a possibility.
- 20 On Hegel's account of truth, cf. Bordignon (2016) and Miolli (2016).
- 21 Cf. SL, 50; WdL, GW21, 59: 'For here, at the beginning ... philosophy is an empty word, a received and yet unjustified notion. Pure knowledge yields only this negative determination, namely that the beginning ought to be *abstract*. If pure being is taken as the *content* of pure knowledge, then the latter must step back from its content, allowing it free play and without determining it further.'
- 22 Cf. VGPE1, 54–55, 227–229, 290–293, 320–321, 326.
- 23 Cf. VGPE1, 24–25, 28–29, 157, 220–221, 293.

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Part Three

Hegel's Metaphilosophy in Context

The Twofold Purposiveness of Philosophical Activity: Hegel on Kant's Idea of Philosophy

Giovanna Luciano

From the time that Hegel began to explore the systematic nature of philosophy as science, that is, from the *Difference* essay to the last editions of the *Encyclopaedia*, he presents the philosophical activity according to two different models of purposiveness. To explain the very doing and the form of development of philosophy, Hegel refers to both the purposiveness of living organism and a kind of poietic production. While the organic purposiveness expresses the internal model of development belonging to natural growth, philosophy as *poiesis* represents an activity with two different poles that generates a distinct product. These two models seem to represent the stem of a contradiction involving Hegel's account of philosophy. In this chapter I will address the tension within the purposiveness of philosophical activity, without eliminating it. I want, then, to show that the vitality of this tension is particularly poignant when considered in relation to some passages in which Hegel refers to Kant's idea of philosophy.

To answer the question about the features of Hegel's idea of philosophy, first of all one has to tackle the problem of a relative shortage of the materials in which Hegel presents his account of philosophy and of how philosophy works. When Hegel gives us some information about philosophy he does so in a programmatic way, often in the introductions and prefaces to his writings. This is the case of the *Difference* essay, the essay on *Philosophical Criticism*, the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the introductions to different editions of the *Encyclopaedia* and to the *Science of Logic*.¹

In a sense, the fact that we cannot find in Hegel's writings a specific section dedicated to a proper metaphilosophical analysis reflects the peculiar character of systematicity of philosophy as science that he wants to pursue. More generally, it involves the idea that for Hegel – just like there is no way to learn to swim but to dive into the water² – philosophy needs no introduction and philosophical self-reflection is a result of the development of philosophical activity understood in full as reason's self-knowledge.

Although the twofold purposiveness of philosophical activity is not strictly thematized by Hegel and it is never the topic of a specific reflection, it is, however, active throughout Hegel's philosophical conception. Recently, amongst Hegelian scholars, there has been a growing interest in the form of purposiveness at stake in

the system, and several contributions have showed the crucial relevance for Hegel of the biological notion of organism and metaphors from life sciences, which belong to a widespread language within the philosophical culture of his time.³ In this chapter I want to highlight the other side of the way through which Hegel expresses the purposiveness of philosophy, that is, the poietic production as *labour* in philosophical activity.

Philosophy as productive activity

The idea of the internal purposiveness of an organism is fundamental for the systematic nature of Hegel's philosophy and represents one of the most relevant issues for understanding the relationship between Hegel and Kantian philosophy. Yet, the internal purposiveness of philosophy is presented by Hegel through the language of endeavour, of labour. I would like to move from Kant's reflection on the systematic form of philosophy to providing some thoughts on Hegel's connection between labour and life on this point.

In the Architectonic of Pure Reason,⁴ Kant presents the characteristics of systematic unity, at the basis of all sciences, insofar as it allows reason to promote its own ends. Therefore, the object of investigation is the essential link between the account of systematicity belonging to a science and reason as capable of having ends. If for Kant systematic unity is central to the project of raising 'ordinary knowledge to the rank of science' (KrV, A 832 / B 860), the specific manner of development that belongs to organisms constitutes the analogy that sketches the correspondence between an idea (the ground upon which a science in general is to be established) and the resulting system. Still, this is true for any science:⁵ the idea expresses not only a mode of being together of a manifold of knowledge but also it reflects the end that is prior to that same manifold, making it a coherent and harmonic whole. The idea represents the origin that is at once the scope and the form of the whole.

The philosophical system of transcendental idealism, as Kant claims in the B Deduction, is in general the 'system of the *epigenesis* of pure reason' (KrV, B 167). In the Architectonic of Pure Reason, the generative mode of the 'self-development of reason' (KrV, A 835 / B 863) is embedded in a discussion aimed at indicating not only the ideal basis of a systematic unity but also the kind of idea that is here at stake.

As if it were an organic germ, the idea hidden in reason is an undifferentiated and undeveloped nucleus that gradually leads to the complete self-development of reason as a system: 'this idea lies hidden in reason, like a germ in which the parts are still undeveloped and barely recognisable even under microscopic observation' (KrV, A 834 / B 862).

According to an epigenetic embryological theory of generation (which Kant has in mind for the construction of the analogy in these passages),⁶ what is generated, the whole, is not a mere mirror image of the origin; it is not the idea as realized or as simply determined, a copy of it; rather, it is the result of a process of individuation and differentiation. Generally, this model is in opposition to a preformative theory that considers a germ as a ready-made individuum, in which all qualities are already disclosed in their reciprocal functional relations. In fact, according to an epigenetic

framework, the idea sustains the whole as a form, which is, however, the possibility of the difference as a development process. Therefore, the law binding the whole is neither blind nor completely transparent; rather, the idea has a reflective manner of exposition, it expresses an underlying directional force: a goal. On the one hand, there is no immediate correspondence between system and idea, and indeed the realization of the idea is configured as an exposition (schema) of rules and a logical nexus; on the other hand, for the system the idea is like a mediate inner. The interconnected whole of parts, distinguished according to functional criteria, is the result of a movement originating in the undifferentiated unity of the idea, which bestows the whole with a unitary purpose. Each part has value as a member of that organized body that is reason, as its internal articulation; hence, the determination of each member has a teleological sense, and the established relationship runs in two correlative directions: between members, and between members and the whole. The idea is at the same time first and what gives the name of the whole, acting as its inner end.

The idea hidden in reason, which grounds the system of pure reason, is for Kant the idea of philosophy: 'philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which nowhere exists *in concreto*, but to which, by many different paths, we endeavour to approximate' (KrV, A 838 / B 866); more precisely, it is the idea of philosophy according to its *conceptus cosmicus* (cosmic concept, or *Weltbegriff*): 'On this view, philosophy is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is not an artificer in the field of reason, but himself the lawgiver of human reason' (KrV, A 839 / B 867).

From the Kantian point of view, the systematic completeness of metaphysics, as it consists in relating rational knowledge to human reason, is given in an eminently processual form. Moreover, the systematic whole based on the Kantian organic model constitutes a negative process of development: a self-differentiation. I think that this kind of processual form is essential for Hegel's own idea of philosophical activity and generates the insuppressible tension between systematic completeness and incompleteness that permeates it.

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes: 'the subject matter is not exhausted in its *aims*; rather, it is exhaustively treated when it is *worked out*. Nor is the *result* which is reached the *actual* whole itself; rather, the whole is the result together with the way the result comes to be' (PS, 5; PhG, GW9, 10).⁸

For Hegel, the activity of the development of philosophy has to keep in itself the *effort* of its own self-production and the mediation proceeding it as a generative core and driving force of the philosophical system. Moreover, from his early Jena years, Hegel kept alive the interest that fuelled his non-philosophical studies on the 'more subordinate needs of man' (LE, 64) by bestowing on philosophy *qua* science and system the general task of philosophy of unifying the cleavage of the epoch, by disclosing its presuppositions.⁹

In the *Difference*, Hegel writes:

the sole interest of reason is to suspend such rigid antithesis. But this does not mean that reason is altogether opposed to opposition and limitation. For the necessary cleavage is one factor in life. Life eternally forms itself by setting up

oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy [*Lebendigkeit*] is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission [*Trennung*].

(DIFF, 91; DIFF, GW4, 13)

Life is then linked to the cleavage: it is the form through which cleavage is given together with the need of its overcoming through philosophy, it expresses the unity of the principle that generates the oppositions and the philosophical comprehension.¹⁰

The model of the organic production in its connection with the model of labour never refers to a vague substantialism or to a spontaneous vitality, but rather to the capacity of the moments of an organic unity to *bear* an inner struggle. Although the model of labour shares with the model of organism the necessity of a moment of opposition within the philosophical development, Hegel uses it to emphasize the characteristics of separation, alterity and determinacy in philosophical activity.

It is within the semantic horizon of labour, as an effort for its own realization, that philosophy is considered in opposition to its characterization as 'love of knowledge', as a pure *contemplative* activity, a sort of passive mirror of truth. In his rejection of a contemplative conception of philosophical knowledge (identified in particular, since the *Difference* essay, in Reinhold's philosophy) is at stake the denial of a philosophy understood as mere technique without any autonomous capacity to produce its own content. The critique of the Reinholdian idea of philosophy (which Hegel eloquently defines as 'comfortable') can in my opinion be read in its entirety in the light of Hegelian opposition to a philosophy committed simply to grasping the truth – already given and not produced by reason – in knowledge:

We can see that [Reinhold's] absolute in the form of truth is not the work of reason [*ein Werk der Vernunft*], because it is *already in and for itself* something true and certain, that is, something cognized and known. Reason cannot assume an active relation to the absolute. On the contrary, if reason were active in any way, if the absolute were to receive any form through it, the activity would have to be viewed as an alteration of the absolute ... the Absolute itself readies itself for being something true and known, and surrenders itself for total enjoyment to the passivity of a thinking which only needs a mouth agape. Strenuous creative construction, in assertoric and categorical statements, is banished from this utopia. A problematic and hypothetical shaking of the tree of knowledge, which grows in a sandy grounding, brings the fruit tumbling down, already chewed and self-digested.

(DIFF, 184–185; DIFF, GW4, 85–86)

In this sense, for Hegel, the problem of philosophy is neither to find the way in which a finite subject can grasp universal truth – allegedly considered as already given, even though not yet in its full transparency – nor to trace back the different and determinate manifestations to a substantial basis as their inner truth. It is not a matter of *unveiling* the truth and it does not concern *men of genius*. Hegel's alternative to such an account is represented by the idea that in the cognitive process, philosophy produces the object of its knowledge, so that the possession

of knowledge is not the destination somehow finally reached, but the activity of its production. For Hegel, as well as for Kant, the task of philosophy is not to 'unlock substance's secret', that is, 'to take what thought has torn asunder and then to stir it all together into a smooth mélange, to suppress the concept that makes those distinctions [*den unterscheidenden Begriff unterdrücken*], and then to fabricate the feeling [*Gefühl*] of the essence' (PS, 7; PhG, GW9, 13). By adopting an approach that is completely opposite to the approach that considers philosophy as science, 'edifying philosophy' holds the concept to be only a reflection on the finiteness; then it gives away understanding and establishes a non-conceptual knowledge of the substance as divine essence or supreme being. Hegel invokes the scientific form of philosophy against the 'prophetic prattle' (PS, 8; PhG, GW9, 14) of those forms of philosophy that aim at feeling or intuiting the absolute instead of conceptually grasping it: 'true shape of truth lies only in its scientific rigor, or (which is the same) in asserting that truth has the element of its existence solely in the concept [*an dem Begriffe allein*]' (PS, 6; PhG, GW9, 12). Moreover, Hegel refers to the *Arbeit* as the characterization of philosophical scientific and systematic activity: 'true thoughts and scientific insight can only be won by the labour of the concept [*in der Arbeit des Begriffes*]' (PS, 44; PhG, GW9, 48).¹¹

Hegel writes: 'this prophetic prattle imagines that it resides at the centre of things, indeed that it is profundity itself, and viewing determinateness (the *horos*) with contempt, it intentionally stands aloof from both the concept and from necessity, which it holds to be a type of reflection at home in mere finitude' (PS, 8; PhG, GW9, 14).

For Hegel, the main problem with an edifying philosophy is less about the wish to elevate the human soul, to leave this sensible present (*Gegenwart*) in order to direct 'people's eyes to the stars' (PS, 7; PhG, GW9, 17) or to the divine essence, and much more about the disdain that this kind of philosophy has for determinacy.

In other words, the movement of elevation (*Erhebung*) from the simple and immediate *Gegenwart* belongs to philosophy and to philosophy's *raison d'être*; this is something that philosophy shares with religion. Nevertheless, regarding its form, the movement of elevation appears quite generic and incapable of expressing the activity that is proper to philosophy, that is, the activity of a non-edifying philosophy.

Philosophy as struggle between worlds

In the 'time of birth' and 'transition to a new period' (PS, 8; PhG, GW9, 14) during which Hegel was living and that he wished to comprehend philosophically, the task of philosophy was not to announce the new epoch or prescribe how the old world should adjust accordingly. On the contrary, philosophy was the most radical experience of life's cleavage, of its splinters, of its multiple and partial manifestation, dealing with the break between the *forms of existence* and the *forms of thinking* of the old world, which the ongoing development of spiritual activity keeps generating.¹² Hegel presents 'the labour at reshaping itself [*Arbeit seiner Umgestaltung*]' (PS, 9; PhG, GW9, 14; translation modified) of the spirit as sneaky and underground; its process coincides

with the dissolution process (*allmähliche Zerbröckeln*) of the old order: the coming to life of the new is the dying of the old, its crumble. And it ends suddenly, with a qualitative leap: the full realization of a new shape.

The cleavage – which is always historically determined and embodied – is structured on the formal level of *Wissen* as the cleavage between forms of existence and forms of thinking, being and thought, reality and concept. Philosophy deals with the cleavage on this formal level, although it is itself a form of knowledge, and therefore it must take on the antithesis made up by philosophy itself, in its different versions.¹³ The legitimacy of philosophical knowledge – Hegel chooses to use terminology from the juridical field when it comes to the duel between the ‘right’ of the old world and the ‘right’ of the new one, and between the ‘right’ of common sense and the ‘right’ of science – is an immanent critique of the forms of knowledge and of the framework of the world they establish.

If the process of dissolution of the established order coincides with the process of birth of the new one, then it could seem that, after a first negative-critical activity of philosophy, the real beginning of the new life can finally take place, and the speculative activity of philosophy can work for the realization of that new life. This second beginning would then be the starting point of the process of development of science according to reason's lead. Does the new world need to cut off all relations with the old world to accomplish its realization?

Hegel addresses this matter in a quite controversial way. There is, in Hegel's words, an echo of the organic and planning metaphors (the project of a building and the germ of an organic evolution)¹⁴ that Kant employs to express philosophical development based on a critique of pure reason:

Yet this newness is no more completely actual than is the newborn child, and it is essential to bear this in mind. Its immediacy, or its concept, is the first to come on the scene. However, just as little of a building is finished when its foundation has been laid, so too reaching the concept of the whole is equally as little as the whole itself. When we wish to see an oak with its powerful trunk, its spreading branches, and its mass of foliage, we are not satisfied if instead we are shown an acorn. In the same way, science, the crowning glory of a spiritual world, is not completed in its initial stages.

(PS, 9; PhG, GW9, 15)

To understand this passage, I think it is important to also refer to the following passage: ‘The beginning of a new spirit is the outcome [*das Product*] of a widespread revolution [*weitläufigen Umwälzung*] in the diversity of forms of cultural formation; it is both the prize at the end of a winding path [*verschlungenen Weges*] just as it is the prize won through much struggle [*Anstrengung*] and effort [*Bemühung*].’ (PS, 9; PhG, GW9, 15).

Hegel conceives the emergence of the new world in the form of an *immediacy*, as a simple/universal concept (*einfach Begriff*); because of its partiality and unilaterality, the *einfach Begriff* is more similar to the *unterscheidend Begriff* than to the *Begriff* understood as life of the truth. The simple/universal concept is the concept of the

whole that is not the whole itself: it is the form of a cleavage between form and content, it is the simple concept insofar as it is not reality. The task of philosophy in regard to the simple concept is to bridge this cleavage. But how can this cleavage be bridged? What does philosophy know about the simple concept in its immediacy? At its first appearance (*Erscheinung*), this concept is nothing but 'the whole enshrouded in its simplicity' (PS, 9; PhG, GW9, 15); it is in a certain sense empty, a sort of container. Yet, about this immediacy philosophy could not say a word if it were not full of the (dying) forms structuring the old world. The dying forms, conscious and known, that constitute the already obsolete spiritual life are in fact, according to Hegel, the 'wealth' of the concept of the new world. The simplicity and the immediacy of the new concept already and inevitably express a cleavage. Yet it is due to this cleavage that the concept finds a conscious and known form: it can be expressed by philosophy. At its first appearance, the concept is unconscious, although it is already living in an immediate way as substance of the new world. To yield the conscious and known form is something that the concept can do only through the labour of philosophy.

Nevertheless, as strange as this formula may sound, the simple concept, in its immediacy, is the result of a production that works unconsciously. The beginning is both immediacy and product, but *simultaneously* so. It is the concept of the whole in its immediate form, only because it is a product. Nevertheless, the distinction between these two sides makes sense only for philosophy *qua* conscious and known form of the whole. Moreover, there is an additional ambiguity of the concept of the whole highlighted by Hegel, which I consider to be of the greatest importance. The *einfach Begriff* at the beginning of science is the product of a *radical upheaval* in two senses: as the result both of a 'winding path' and of *Anstrengung* and 'effort'.

These two paths, which generate the knowledge of the new form, do not immediately coincide, although they participate in the same productive activity. While the 'winding path' refers to a contorted, unclear way that goes on covered and almost hidden, the way of the *Anstrengung* is instead what philosophy can take. The winding path is a complex process of producing the changes that fuel the spiritual sphere; it comprehends the world of human activity – not simply the field of philosophical reflection – whose finality, considering the set of these activities as a whole, transcends the singular aims of each of them. From a general point of view, it is an unconscious production: it shows itself as substance.

Thus, from a general point of view, it can be said that philosophy works on the side of consciousness. Philosophy follows that winding path and puts in place the fundamental activity of *Ausbildung der Form*, a formal 'refinement'. The process of science consists in this: in the determination of the differences composing the content of the new form and their mutual relations. In this way, philosophy gives a proper form to the form in its immediate and simple guise. Philosophy is the forming process of the form: it bestows on it systematic shape.

The intelligibility of philosophy depends on this prize won through the *Anstrengung* of the refinement of the form of the *einfach Begriff*. Hegel claims that 'without this refinement (*Ausbildung*),¹⁵ science has no general intelligibility' (PS, 10; PhG, GW9, 15). In the form of an immediate manifestation of the whole – as *einfach Begriff* holding an inner *Entzweiung* between form and content – philosophy appears for Hegel as an

esoteric activity, capable of finding interest in dealing with dead content to elevate it to the life of the new form: without the refinement of the form, science 'seems to be the esoteric possession of only a few individuals – an esoteric possession, because at first science is only available in its concept, or in what is internal to it, and it is the possession of a few individuals, since its appearance in this not-yet fully unfurled form makes its existence into something wholly singular' (PS, 10; PhG, GW9, 15).

There is nothing very interesting in the beginning of philosophy but the contradictions it keeps inside.

Philosophy devotes its attention to the dead content of the new form, not hoping for its resurrection, but by posing itself as the definitive seed of its destruction. It is a seed that radically changes both content and form. To this dead content, philosophy is therefore an 'inverted world' (*verkehrte Welt*) (PC, 283; PK, GW4, 125)¹⁶ a craziness for common sense (*gesunden Menschenverstande*), and even *esoteric*. Indeed, it is in this way that in 1802, in the Introduction of the *Kritische Journal (On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism)*, that Hegel defines philosophy: 'Philosophy is, by its very nature, something esoteric, neither made for the vulgar as it stands, nor capable of being got up to suit the vulgar taste' (PC, 283; PK, GW4, 125). A similar tone is kept in his pamphlet *Who Thinks Abstractly?* (1808). Insofar as philosophy is the opposite of common sense (its inversion), it is esoteric. Similarly, Hegel writes to van Ghert in 1812: 'To the uninitiated, speculative philosophy must in any case present itself as the inverted world [*verkehrte Welt*], contradicting all their accustomed concepts and whatever else appeared valid to them according to so-called sound common sense [*gesunden Menschenverstande*]' (LE, 591; translation modified).

Nevertheless, in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel strongly affirms the *exoteric* and intelligible character of philosophy as science, as the developed form of the *Begriff*: 'Only what is completely determinate is at the same time exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and possessed by everybody. The intelligible form of science is the path offered to everyone and equally available for all' (PS, 10; PhG, GW9, 15).

Even though philosophy does appear as an inverted world to common sense, and the task of philosophy is indeed to tip what is natural, familiar and well known (*bekannt*) upside down, the development of science is not a blind violence against it. The conceptual knowledge of philosophy consists in this labour: to make something known cognitively (*erkannt*) out of what is well known (*bekannt*), to achieve rational knowledge through understanding.

A matter of eating and digestion

What emerges from these considerations is the radical idea of a transformative or even subversive account of philosophical labour, in opposition to a neutral one. Philosophy works according to an internal touchstone of truth: it does not aim at reflecting what is true in itself. Since philosophy is in general a thinking activity, it changes the meaning of what it considers;¹⁷ however, philosophy does not stop at reproducing the object in the fixed subjective form, as understanding does. Hegel writes: 'Through the process of thinking something over, its content is altered from the way it is in sensation, intuition,

or representation initially. Thus, it is only by means of an alteration that the true nature of the object emerges in consciousness' (EL, §22, 56; ENZ, GW20, §22, 62).

Insofar as what is true is the change, the transformative activity of thinking, philosophy (as *Nachdenken*) shares something fundamental with the reflective thinking of understanding. To describe the Kantian transcendental position and its focus on the subjective conditions of the possibility of knowledge, Hegel uses the image of *eating* and of its conditions. Like the constitutive means of the act of eating, the conditions of time and space of the Transcendental Aesthetic are considered by Hegel the mouth and the teeth of the subject eating an object that, on the contrary, has no mouth and teeth. In the Kantian section of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, we read:

There are things in themselves outside, but devoid of time and space; consciousness now comes, and it has time and space beforehand present in it as the possibility of experience, just as, in order to eat, it has a mouth, teeth, etc. as conditions necessary for eating. The things which are eaten have not the mouth and teeth, and what eating does to things, so space and time do to them.

(LHP1 III, 435; VGP III, 341; translation modified)¹⁸

According to this image, thinking is a unidirectional process; it violently crushes an unarmed *non-organic* nature. Both the things that are about to be eaten and the eater are like independent entities, abstract starting points of the eating process, which are activated within the process itself. The process of eating goes *from* the subject *to* the object: by chewing the object, the subject radically changes the form of non-organic nature, which can then be swallowed, and fulfil its aim by becoming nourishment. There is a sort of finality that the subject bestows on the non-organic nature, when she chooses to eat it. The non-organic nature is there *for* the subject in order to be eaten; therefore, it has no intrinsic value. Similarly, the act of thinking is a process of idealization, a limitless power over externality through which a 'thing' becomes something 'thought'. The subject transforms the givenness and elevates it with the higher meaning of the *ideal*: givenness becomes something subjective, which belongs to us. It is a property of the subject.

Although, for Hegel, the image of eating describes a one-sided process, it expresses at the same time something true; thus, I do not think it is merely another of Hegel's criticisms against Kant's subjectivism. Hegel chooses to use the same image also to indicate a 'wisdom' known since the old Eleusinian secrets of 'the eating of bread and the drinking of wine' (PS, 66; PhG, GW9, 69). This kind of *wisdom* belongs also to animals and, in general, to any kind of animated being, insofar as they 'do not stand still in the face of sensuous things, as if those things existed in themselves. Despairing of the reality of those things and in the total certainty of the nullity of those things, they without any further ado simply help themselves to them and devour them' (PS, 67; PhG, GW9, 69). First of all, to eat the object means negating its presupposed autonomy, its independent subsistence, the fact that it could have true reality in itself; second, it means to make the object like the subject, to mould the object into something subjective. In other words, the knowing subject *assimilates* (*sich assimilieren*) the

nature by negating it. The negative activity of the process of assimilation underlines a movement that Hegel describes as 'unconscious' and 'immediate', linked to the subject's structure (teeth, mouth or the internal organs and the gastric juices in digestion) and the peculiar meaning that *receptivity* assumes for the subject (assimilation). Indeed, the receptivity of the otherness for the subject has indeed a specific kind of activity, a type of unification of subject and object. On this point, Hegel refers to Aristotle's *De Anima*, according to which the process of assimilation is structured as an *activity-within-passivity*; the mediation between subject and object is carried on by a subject that is constitutively predisposed to do that.¹⁹

Nevertheless, for Hegel, the comparison between assimilation and the thinking process does not result in an error due to a subjective way of conceiving of thought; instead it shows an essential aspect of the process of thinking and its negativity, as well as of the same structure of the subjectivity in a wide sense. In general, such a comparison highlights what Hegel considers the 'natura', 'instinctive' or 'impulsive' character of thinking activity.

Thinking, as the movement of idealization led by the subject, is this 'swallowing up' of the object; it imposes a sceptical position against the truth of the object and the negation of the *for-itself* of externality: in one word, thinking is *idealism*. As immediate negation of the autonomy and independence of the object, the I posits itself as the substance and the *in-itself* of the object, as the substrate or universal genre (*Gattung*) that unifies the otherness under the form of what is 'mine'. As power of the otherness, the I sublates it: the I does not destroy the otherness from an external position, and the otherness does not simply flake apart in the mediation; in reaching its *ideal* meaning, the otherness realizes its internal finality.

Generally, far from the passivity of philosophy (such as Reinholdian philosophy) understood as simply a 'mouth agape', I think that the image of eating, employed – according to Hegel – by Kantian philosophy to understand the activity of subjectivity, has to be understood in connection with Hegel's physiological studies. To grasp what Hegel concretely means by comparing thinking activity to the process of assimilation and by using this image regarding Kant's philosophy in its most subjective aspects is important for the comprehension of Hegel's account of thinking, cognition and subjectivity. At the same time, this is crucial for understanding the nature of philosophical activity as a specific and peculiar kind of thinking, and philosophical criticism in terms of philosophy's inner critique.

In the Jena period, Hegel engages with the study of physiology and in particular with the process of digestion. Such an interest is kept alive also in his later writings up to the last edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, where we find an exposition of the meaning of the process of assimilation (*Assimilation*) in the Philosophy of Nature (EPN, §§357–366 A, 380–410; ENZ, GW20, §§357–366; ENZ, W9, §§357–366 Z, 464–498)²⁰ and the comparison of the process of assimilation with thinking and with the general activity of spirit in regard to nature (EPM, §381 A, 14; ENZ, W10, §381 Z, 23).²¹

From modern physiology, Hegel learned that the organism, as universal power, *immediately* absorbs food as particularity; the organism negates the non-organic nature of food and posits that as identical to itself.²² Organic life incorporates in its own flesh and blood non-organic nature; in this activity, the non-organic

becomes the particular of the universal that is the organism. For Hegel, digestion is a metamorphosis incomprehensible from a purely mechanical or chemical point of view; it is a *teleological* metamorphosis, dominated by the power of organic life. Hegel writes: 'The chief moment in digestion is the immediate action of life as the power over its non-organic object which it presupposes as its stimulus only in so far as it is in itself identical with it, but is, at the same time, its ideality and being-for-self' (EPN, §365 R, 395; ENZ, W9, §365 A, 481).

Only in this assimilation does non-organic nature find its truth. For Hegel, such a power of animated beings expresses the *substantial relation*, in so much as the non-organic nature is immediately engulfed by the subject:

The ground of every reciprocal relation between these two [the organic and the non-organic] is just this absolute unity of the substance through which the non-organic is thoroughly transparent, ideal and non-objective for the organic. The alimentary process is merely this transformation of the non-organic nature into a corporeality belonging to the subject ... The power of animality is the substantial relation, the main thing in digestion.

(EPN, §365 A, 397; ENZ, W9, §365 Z, 483)

Hegel underlines several times the immediate and unconscious character of the mediation process of assimilation; within such a context, he expresses that kind of immediate mediation that is assimilation by using the paradoxical utterance '*das bewusste Begreifen*' (EPN, §365 A, 399; ENZ, W9, §365 Z, 485); Hegel claims that assimilation is an *unconscious comprehending* of the non-organic. This comparison opens a series of interpretative difficulties involving different matters, particularly Hegel's account of thinking and the 'natural' and 'instinctive' aspect of the thinking process. What does it mean in general that assimilation is an immediate process of mediation? In which way does this immediacy apply to thinking activity? Moreover, how is the unconsciousness implicated in comprehending?

As already mentioned, in the alimentary process, the organic is the author of a one-sided action over the non-organic; in this way, the organic brings the non-organic to identity-with-itself. According to Hegel, digestion describes the movement of mediation of itself with otherness as a logical development of its abstract identity. The process of mediation and the immediate character of such a process does not seem to be in mutual conflict. Immediately the *structure* of the organism is oriented to take possession of the non-organic. It is an activity carried on by the organism spontaneously and unconsciously. Nevertheless, the organism digests the non-organic in a processual way, through different moments and organs;²³ Hegel stresses the autonomy of the organism, showing the movement of mediation as completely dominated and oriented by the organism itself: the mediation is '*for its own sake* in order to be movement and consequently actuality' (EPN, §365 A, 399; ENZ, W9, §365 Z, 485). The process of digestion, through its different moments, is an internal modification of a substance that is actual only insofar as it is not a permanent substratum, but a reflective movement through otherness. In other words, the life of the organism, in all its autonomy and self-reference, is so only as an activity that makes itself passive.²⁴

Its receptivity is a mode of its activity, and it is thus constitutively open to otherness: it is necessarily and immediately defective, split, needy and hungry.

According to such an analogy between the process of assimilation and thinking activity in general, it is possible to grasp a sort of *naturality* of thought; we think as we digest: unconsciously. Of course, it is not to say that we are not aware of what we think; instead, we are unaware of the complexity of that dynamic.

On the natural aspect of thinking, in the Preface to the first edition of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel says that we don't learn how to think through logic, 'just as if one were to learn how to digest or to move first from the study of anatomy and physiology' (SL, 8; WdL, GW21, 6). Hegel presents it almost as a joke; however, besides sarcasm, it indicates a sort of independence of the process of 'natural' thinking from the process of its 'being known'. The first kind of thinking can and does work without the second, while the second is a reflection on the first.

For the thinking subject, *consciousness* constitutes the form of such natural and *unconscious* thinking: consciousness is the immediate form of our thinking activity. We think and, for us, thinking is a one-sided action, we speak the language of the subject, we are in an immediate way the focal point, the agent of our activity: an absolute beginning. Thinking is doing: our action constitutes a break from an amorphous continuity. Breaking is the way in which we possess otherness and through otherness we reflect on ourselves: 'the most rational thing that children can do with their toys is to break them' (EPM, §396 A, 57; ENZ, W10, §396 Z, 80). In such action, children apprehend their I-hood as a return from externality. The separation between the subject and that on which the subject acts is given *immediately* only through activity on otherness, which in this sense, is similar to what I said for the organism: the passivity is already an active mode of thinking.

I think the natural character of thought has to be understood within the dynamic of the process of assimilation of externality, that is, within the epistemological perspective that defines and permeates every human activity: it is like an instinct for human beings. The naturality of thought is the instinct to make otherness something mine – the instinct to recognize ourselves in that on which we act. Thus, for Hegel, the epistemological perspective that belongs in a wide sense to every human activity does not refer to a pure theoretical approach to objectivity; rather it shapes a process of alteration that objectifies objects and at the same time objectifies the subject: it is the synthesis of object and self.

In the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel says:

Whereas the animal is silent or expresses its pain only by groaning, the child expresses the feeling of its needs by screaming. By this ideal activity the child shows that it is straightaway imbued with the certainty that it has the right to demand from the external world the satisfaction of its needs, – that the independence [*Selbständigkeit*] of the external world in face of man is void.

(EPM, §396 A, 56; ENZ, W10, §396 Z, 79)

At a closer look, then, it seems that the instinctive negative relationship between the human being and the external world (as early and unconscious expression of

thinking activity) is already different from the one involving animals: it is immediately a 'right' of thinking subjectivity. Philosophy works exactly on the untold assumptions that the dynamic of assimilation bears: on thinking as an instinct. On thinking as natural, philosophy can see the layering of the present, of the new shape of spirit. The immediate mediation of thinking activity involves a 'produced' naturalness that ignores its own becoming. Philosophy reflects on the layers that build the frame in which we move.

To borrow Bodei's words, philosophy brings to light the '*Denkbestimmungen* that are already unconsciously present in individuals and in the epoch; in this respect philosophy has only an eminently *maieutic* function' (Bodei 2014: 136; my translation and emphasis). In its natural aspect, thinking is for us a language, a universality that structures our horizon of meaning and through which we say things; however, we do not put language into question, since it is for us a natural acquisition, a habit. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel expresses this natural character of thought as a 'natural logic': 'In everything that the human being has interiorized, in everything that in some way or other has become for him a representation, in whatever he has made his own, there has language penetrated, and everything that he transforms into language and expresses in it contains a category, whether concealed, mixed, or well defined' (SL, 12; WdL, GW21, 10). He then asks: 'I have said elsewhere, what is familiar is for that reason not known, and it can even be a source of irritation to have to occupy oneself with the familiar – and what could be more familiar than just those determinations of thought which we employ everywhere, and are on our lips in every sentence that we utter?' (SL, 13; WdL, GW21, 12).

First of all, philosophy is subversion of the familiar order and there is nothing more familiar, unconscious and substantial than thought.

Philosophical labour as activity on the instinct

According to Hegel, philosophy is one of the modes of thinking. Insofar as it is thinking in general, like every thinking activity, philosophy is a process of mediation and movement of alternation of its object. However, philosophy is not immediate, natural and unconscious assimilation, but more specifically a labour (*Arbeit*). In his essay 'Labor and Interaction', Habermas focuses his attention exactly on this point and traces differences and similarities between the dialectic of labour that mediates subject and object and the mediating dialectic of representation. Habermas writes: 'Just as language breaks the dictates of immediate perception and orders the chaos of the manifold impressions into identifiable things, so labour breaks the dictates of immediate desires and, as it were, arrests the process of drive satisfaction' (Habermas 1973: 153–154). Here, Habermas addresses something fundamental. The break that subjectivity posits with the universalization of the particular in the process of labour is doubled and posited within subjectivity itself.

Within the process of eating as a metaphor for the thinking process, an apple that I decide to eat has value only as a particularized desire: I immediately assimilate

nature. Thinking posits and unifies the separation in the ideal form that makes the object something thought, a synthesis. Within the process of labour not only does the product not immediately correspond to the desire but also the worker suspends her/his immediate desire: the product of her/his labour constitutes a translated desire. Moreover, the force that the worker transfers in the product is not a blind force: unlike the teeth that destroy an inanimate and unarmed nature, in the process of labour the worker forges the object according to laws imposed by nature. In this sense, Hegel describes the process of labour in contrast with an instinctive activity: 'Labour is not an instinct, but a rational act' (JS I, GW6, 319; my translation).²⁵

In regard to philosophy, I claimed that the *einfach Begriff* of science has to be understood both as a product and path. The process of labour exemplifies the activity that philosophy has to do as self-development of the *einfach Begriff*, in light of another point that I find crucial. The in-itself of the *einfach Begriff*, the beginning of science, is an already mediated immediacy. Similarly, the raw material of the process of labour is not in fact a pure naturality, a givenness. According to Hegel, the content of a simple concept has then the form of something thought, something consumed, an 'abbreviation'. Thus, it is not something original, rather it is a being-negated, the simple negation of being.

If thinking in general is the activity of abstraction of subjectivity, the instinct (or also the right) to make of the world something mine, philosophy is always a *second-order* thinking activity, the elaboration of a material that has the shape of an *already-thought*, an *abstraction*. In this sense, the world in the form of something mine is the *raw material* of philosophy, since being is always already the result of a thinking activity of abstraction. Philosophy does not work above the internal discrepancy of the products of thinking, but is the rational comprehension of the abstraction itself, of the nature of thinking insofar as thinking becomes, through its alteration, truth of reality.

Philosophy aims at changing the immediate form of the oppositions and separations of the understanding and at giving them the systematic form of rational knowledge. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement of the separation between thought and reality throughout Kant's philosophy does not simply determine its suppression. On the contrary, for Hegel, what is achieved is a philosophical form of the separation: what brings to light the transformative character of thought towards reality.

Notes

- 1 Sandkaulen considers the opening of *Difference* essay is a prototypical text for Hegel's thematization of philosophy, proposed by Hegel again in the later formulations; see Sandkaulen (2017: 3–27).
- 2 In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel writes: 'But the examination of knowing cannot take place other than *by way of knowing*. With this so-called instrument, examining it means nothing other than acquiring knowledge of it. But to want to know *before* one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic's wise resolution to learn to *swim*, *before he ventured into the water*' (EL, §10, 38; ENZ, GW20, §10, 51). The *Encyclopaedia Logic*

- is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation. References include the section (§) number and page number of the German and English edition.
- 3 See Stanguennec (1997), Illetterati and Michelini (2008), Sell (2013, 2021), Illetterati (2016) and Achella (2019). Amongst Hegel's scholars, there is also an interest in the notion of autonomy and its analogy with the inner teleology of life that aims at understanding the form of freedom and its realization; see Jaeggi (2014), Khurana (2017) and Ng (2020).
 - 4 Quotations of passages from *Critique of Pure Reason* are taken from the Norman Kemp Smith translation (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929); all citations from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will henceforth follow standard citation practice in referring to the A edition of 1781 and the B edition of 1787 when providing *Akademie Ausgabe* page numbers.
 - 5 Kant writes: 'no one attempts to establish a science unless he has an idea upon which to base it' (KrV, A 834 / B 862).
 - 6 On the notion of 'epigenesis of reason' (KrV, B 167), see Mensch (2013: 80–82, 110–145) and Goy (2014). See also O'Neill (1989: 3–80), Kleingeld (1998) and Barale (2008).
 - 7 Cosmic concept 'has always formed the real basis of the term "philosophy"' (KrV, A 838 / B 866).
 - 8 Quotations of passages from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are taken from Pinkard and Baur's translation (2018).
 - 9 On the decisive turn in Hegel's studies from political, socioeconomic, historical and theological readings to philosophy and on Hegel's interest in the tangible aspect of human existence, see Pöggeler (1973: 110–169).
 - 10 On Hegel's teleological form of philosophical comprehension in relation to Kant's philosophy, see Chiereghin (1990), Lugarini (1992) and Nuzzo (2012).
 - 11 In his recent translation of the *Phenomenology*, Pinkard often prefers the plural 'concepts', even when in the original text Hegel uses the singular 'concept'. I do not share Pinkard's decision, and I therefore modified his translation.
 - 12 On this point, see Macherey (2017).
 - 13 To the notion of *philosophical criticism* and to its justification on the spiritual level, Hegel devotes a major part of his endeavour during the Jena period and as editor (with Schelling) of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (the task of this journal was indeed to carry on an immanent critique of philosophy). The matter of philosophical criticism comes back in the preface to *Phenomenology*, as well as in the *Encyclopaedia*, as constituting a crucial aspect of philosophical labour. 'Genuine philosophy' cannot be exempt from an engagement with the 'reflective culture' (PC, 282; PK, GW4, 124) of the new epoch (composed of the philosophies of reflection – mainly Kant, Fichte, Reinhold, Jacobi, Schulze – and *Populärphilosophie*). On this matter, see de Boer (2012: 86–89).
 - 14 On the two teleological models involving Kantian reason, see Ferrarin (2015: 25–104).
 - 15 Pinkard translates '*Ausbildung*' and '*Ausbildung der Form*' with 'development' and 'development of the form'. I disagree with his choice, for 'development' is more generic and it can refer to a natural and spontaneous process of change. Therefore, I think that 'refinement' and 'refinement of the form' is more adequate to indicate a laborious and conscious activity like the *Ausbildung*, which is carried on by philosophy.
 - 16 On the image of the *verkehrte Welt*, see Verene (1985: 39–58) and Gadamer (1966).

- 17 On this point, Nuzzo says: 'Hegel argues that thought necessarily transforms whatever it thinks. And since in philosophy thinking or reason takes rationality in its actual shapes as its content the philosophical problem of thinking change is ultimately the problem of a form of rationality capable of immanent self-transformation'; see Nuzzo (2007: 291–307). Moreover, Nuzzo raises the question if philosophy can think the reality of the change without losing the internal dynamic. On rational dialectic as logic of historical transformation and, therefore as tool for thinking the transformative processes, see also Nuzzo (2018).
- 18 The *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* are quoted according to Haldane and Simson's translation (1896).
- 19 The structure of this *activity-within-passivity* and Hegel's reference to *De Anima* II regarding this matter are showed by Ferrarin; see Ferrarin (2004: 221–222).
- 20 Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is quoted according to Miller's translation (2004). References include section (§) number and page number of the German and English edition.
- 21 The *Philosophy of Mind* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (2007). References include section (§) number and page number of the German and English edition. Bodei shows the meaning of the equivalence between assimilation and the thinking dynamic, by dealing with Hegel's bibliographic sources during the Jena period, when Hegel attended Professor Jakob Fidelis Ackermann's lectures on physiology. As Hegel also reports in the *Philosophy of Nature*, Lazzaro Spallanzani (*Opuscoli di fisica animale e vegetale, I: Della digestione*), is his main source of information on the digestion process; see Bodei (2014: 99–108).
- 22 See Bodei (2014: 102).
- 23 Hegel argues: 'If the organism does bring the non-organic into an identity with itself gradually through separate stages (*Momente*), this complex arrangement of digestion through the intermediation of several organs is *for the non-organic*, indeed superfluous: but it is not so for the organism which progresses through these moments within itself *for its own sake* in order to be movement and consequently actuality' (EPN, §365 A, 399; ENZ, W 9, §365 Z, 485).
- 24 On the structure of the organism as 'impulse' (*Trieb*) and 'activity of lacking' (*Thätigkeit des Mangels*), see Illetterati (2014: 155–165).
- 25 See Bodei (2014: 180). In Hegel's considerations in Jena, we found that the dynamic of labour becomes coextensive to the dynamic of objectification of spirit. On this point, see Fornaro (1978), Adorno (1993: 1–52), O'Connor (1999), Arndt (2003) and Cesarale (2009).

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‘What the Lot is Not Being Lost on the Long Road from Spirit to System!’: Jacobi’s Non-Philosophical Contradiction of Hegel’s System of Philosophy

Peter Jonkers

Introduction

The quote in the title of this contribution, stemming from Fichte’s letter to Jacobi from April 1796, summarizes not only the difference between his philosophy and Jacobi’s but also points to the gap that separates Hegel’s system of philosophy from Jacobi’s ‘non-philosophy’. After expressing his approval of the kernel of Jacobi’s philosophical insights, Fichte notes that their only difference is that Jacobi uncovers the spirit as spirit, insofar as human language is capable to do this, whereas he sets himself the task of conceiving the spirit in the form of a system to introduce it into the philosophical schools. Yet, Fichte also realizes that the risk of his approach is that a lot is ‘being lost on the long road from spirit to system’ (JBW11, 102–103).¹

Whereas Fichte tried to downplay their mutual differences, Jacobi felt a profound antipathy towards every system of philosophy or, as he calls it, towards immanent or alone philosophy, thereby not only rejecting Fichte’s ‘doctrine of science’ but also Hegel’s idea of philosophy as a systematic whole. This antipathy resonates in Jacobi’s reaction to Hegel’s devastating critique of his philosophy in *Faith and Knowledge*: he writes that he actually feels relieved after being stoned by Hegel, because it reveals the fundamental opposition of his philosophy against the members of the new school of philosophy (JWA2, 340).² Moreover, Jacobi was convinced that the reason for the antipathy of this new school towards him was its inclination to philosophical systematism, which permeated the overall spirit of the era, whereas he thought that it was timely to criticize it (ABW2, 303).³

Phrased positively, Jacobi portrays himself as ‘an author of *coincidence* or *opportunity*, for whom science and truth have no *unconditional* value, and whose love for science and truth is hence subordinate, *interested*, and therefore *impure*’ (JWA1, 337).

This implies, amongst others, that he does not opt for a logical refutation of the views of his philosophical opponents, since this would make him part of the kind of philosophy from which he wants to take distance. Rather, Jacobi's approach consists in contradicting and thereby upsetting immanent or alone philosophy from an alternative standpoint. Obviously, this standpoint does not follow from an irrefutable and well-grounded philosophical argument, or from a suspension in the (threefold) Hegelian sense of this term, but rather rests on Jacobi's personal decision to turn away from immanent philosophy. Jacobi calls this movement a *salto mortale* (summersault); it is not a leap into the irrational, but results from a double *philosophical* insight into the deadlock of systematic philosophy and an intimation of a different domain of truth, which is out of reach for immanent philosophy. Hence, Jacobi fully agrees with Fichte's observation that something is lost on the road from spirit to system, but he interprets it, against Fichte, as manifesting the utter failure of immanent or alone philosophy as such.

In sum, Jacobi intervened in the philosophical mainstream of his time from a completely different paradigm, not so much as a critic of modern philosophy, but rather as a 'privileged heretic' (JMW, 505; JWA2, 198).⁴ Against this background, it is no surprise that his contradiction of Hegel, which this chapter intends to analyse, uncovers an important aspect of the latter's idea of philosophy. The underlying question of this chapter is whether it belongs to the nature of philosophy to be systematic, which means that it has to think (material and spiritual) reality as a completely coherent whole, or that the task of philosophy is a quite different one, namely to reveal immediate, individual existence, and to show that alone philosophy only annihilates it because of the rigidity of its concepts and argumentation. To do so, the next section will present an outline of Hegel's idea of philosophy as a systematic whole. The section thereafter will analyse how Jacobi's 'non-philosophical philosophy' contradicts and at the same time upsets this key element of Hegel's thinking. It culminates in opposing Jacobi's summersault or leap against Hegel's idea of suspension. The final section will examine why Jacobi's ideas intrigued Hegel so much, even though their views differed fundamentally; it will be argued that Jacobi's ingenious phrases and images served for Hegel as a bad conscience for his attempt to stay loyal to his youth ideal.

As a consequence of this focus, this chapter will not comprise a detailed historical analysis of Hegel's relation to Jacobi, developing from an intensive study of Jacobi's ideas and their impact on Hegel's writings in the Frankfurt period (from 1797 to 1800), over a polemical critique, especially in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), of Jacobi as an exemplar of the subjective shape of the philosophy of reflexivity, to a nuanced appraisal of Jacobi's importance for the history of modern philosophy in his *Review of the Third Volume of Jacobi's Works* (1817), in the *Preliminary Notion* of the *Encyclopaedia* (1827–1830) and in the courses on the *History of Philosophy* (1825–1831) (Althof 2017: 43–58). Another question that will not be discussed in detail is the development of Hegel's idea of philosophy as a system. Finally, this chapter refrains from a detailed discussion of the secondary literature on the relationship between Hegel and Jacobi, but focuses on the relevant primary texts of these two authors (Althof 2017: 319–330).

Hegel's idea of philosophy as a systematic whole

By stating that 'to help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science ... that is what I have set myself to do' (PS, 3; PhG, GW9, 11),⁵ Hegel makes clear that he is a tributary to one of the leading principles of modern philosophy. Moreover, he is also convinced that his philosophy complies with this principle in the most exemplary way because it offers an absolute, systematic foundation to all other sciences.

The reason why Hegel thought that philosophy has to take the shape of thinking the whole of reality in its necessary coherence is that he saw it as the only solution to the deadlock of his time (the Enlightenment), marked by all kinds of fixed oppositions (DIFF, 91; DIFF, GW4, 14). This situation gives rise to the need for philosophy because it is able to think every finite reality in its relation with the absolute as a living, dynamic whole that unifies all oppositions. The term *aufheben* (to suspend) summarizes Hegel's understanding of how the relation between the finite and the absolute should be conceived. To get an idea of the complexity of this term the following quote is revealing: Although indeed

the sole interest of reason to suspend such rigid antitheses ... this does not mean that reason is altogether opposed to opposition and limitation. For the necessary dichotomy is One factor in life. Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission. What reason opposes, rather, is just the absolute fixity which the intellect gives to the dichotomy; and it does so all the more if the absolute opposites themselves originated in reason.

(DIFF, 90–91; DIFF, GW4, 13–14)

This means, first, that the absolute is the integrated whole of all the antithetic aspects of reality. Second, the way in which these antitheses come together in the absolute has to be thought as a self-moving process, just like life forms itself through an endless series of fissions, the deepest of which is that between life and death. Third, the combination of the two previous theses implies that the absolute is not a positively given, static unity, but a dynamic, self-establishing movement, which does not negate, but unifies and integrates all rigid oppositions, fixed limitations and deep fissions.⁶ Fourth, philosophy does not stand outside the absolute totality, but rather has to express its defining moments in their systematic, necessary, self-developing coherence. In other words, the absolute cannot be thought as distinguished from its manifestation in philosophy, but is nothing else than the whole of this manifestation, which reaches its self-knowledge in the system of philosophy (Jaeschke and Arndt 2012: 548–549). Therefore, philosophy cannot content itself with an immediate, intellectual intuition of the absolute, but has to adopt a reflexive form, in which the absolute is presented and developed conceptually. At first sight, this seems contradictory: reflection consists in positing theses and antitheses, hence in producing oppositions, whereas the absolute is an encompassing whole. Hegel's solution of this contradiction is to interpret it as an antinomy, in which both sides stand apart from each other, but are also related to each other:

Reflection in isolation is the positing of opposites, and this would be a suspension of the absolute ... But reflection as reason has a connection with the absolute, and it is reason only because of this connection. In this respect, reflection nullifies itself and all being and everything limited, because it connects them with the absolute. But at the same time the limited gains standing precisely on account of its connection with the absolute.

(DIFF, 94; DIFF, GW4, 16–17)

Hegel summarizes the structure and contents of the system of philosophy as follows: 'In this self-production of reason the absolute shapes itself into an objective totality, which is a whole in itself held fast and complete, having no ground outside itself, but founded by itself in its beginning, middle and end' (DIFF, 113; DIFF, GW4, 30). Philosophy presents the absolute for the knowing consciousness as a necessary, coherent whole. It thereby gives shape to the absolute as an objective totality, although this production and shaping are actually a self-production and self-shaping of the absolute.

Jacobi's non-philosophical philosophy

Although Hegel's appraisal of Jacobi's thinking grew over the years, Jacobi, from his part, remained throughout his life clearly aware of the gap that separated his own philosophizing from Hegel's idea of philosophy as a system. He frames it as a gap between 'alone philosophy' or a 'completely immanent philosophy' versus his own 'non-philosophy, that has its essence in non-knowledge' (JMW, 501, see also 503, 507; JWA2, 194, see also 197, 200).

First of all, Jacobi's contradiction of alone philosophy should not be understood as if he would turn his back against philosophy altogether. On the contrary, he qualifies himself explicitly as a philosopher, albeit of a special kind, that is, 'by virtue of [his] *nature or character*; an author only *by chance* or just an *occasional* author' (JWA1, 337). Therefore, this contradiction is neither a rational refutation of alone philosophy nor a leap into the irrational or a refusal to reflect, since this would either close the gap that separates his non-philosophy from alone philosophy, or make his thinking philosophically irrelevant. Rather, Jacobi's philosophical project rests upon a double philosophical insight, namely a clear view of the deadlock of alone philosophy, being the point of departure of his summersault, and the immediate, existential experience of free acting persons and an awareness of the living, personal God, being the domain where he will land after his leap. In sum, Jacobi explicitly wishes to enter into a (sympathetic) *philosophical* discussion with alone philosophy, since without a stable point of departure there is no summersault. Yet the focus of this discussion is antipathetic, since the core of Jacobi's philosophical project consists in showing that the rigid argumentations and conclusive justifications of immanent philosophy annihilate the existential experiences, whereas his own non-philosophy aims at revealing (or hinting at) their true nature. This implies that Jacobi aims to reflect philosophically on the above double insight, albeit in his own personal, existential way (Sandkaulen 2000: 61; Althof 2017: 164).

In relation with the previous point, the question is: how does Jacobi's sympathetic/antipathetic discussion with alone philosophy work out? The following quote is illustrative in this respect:

I must make out how the opposing claim is, not *absurd*, but *rational*. I have to discover the ground of the mistake, to see how it could happen to a serious mind, and be able to get inside the mind of the thinker who made the error, to make it along with him, and so have a sympathy for his conviction. Until I have managed this, I cannot persuade myself that I have truly comprehended the man with whom I am in conflict.

(JMW, 282; JWA2, 43)

This means that Jacobi starts with admitting that the claim of his adversary is indeed rationally conclusive. Then, to discover his opponent's error he takes the psychological approach to get into the mind of his opponent and argue along with him until he gets a certain philosophical sympathy with the latter's convictions. However, this sympathy only goes as far as their rationality, since Jacobi is certain that the (rational) convictions of his opponent are mistaken, not because these convictions would not be rational (enough), but rather because they are *too rational*! In this context, the term 'rational' refers to the universal concepts and the rigid demonstrations of alone philosophy, which exclude or even annihilate the immediate, existential experiences of free acting persons, a living, personal God, etc. This explains why Jacobi's initial sympathy with his opponent eventually turns into antipathy and, secondly, why he contradicts rather than logically refutes the ideas of his philosophical opponents (Sandkaulen 2000: 31–32; 2006: 13; 2019: 24–25).

Jacobi's contradiction of alone philosophy also characterizes his approach to Hegel's idea of philosophy. He does not aim to (logically) refute Hegel's claim that his system of philosophy is able to conceptualize the whole of reality in its necessary, rational coherence. Rather, Jacobi interprets the pretended universality, demonstrative necessity and conceptual rigidity of Hegel's system as resulting from his mindset that, although resting on a fundamental philosophical insight, is just as personal and existential as his own decision to contradict Hegel's project. Jacobi defines Hegel's philosophical mindset, which he shares with other representatives of alone philosophy, as logical enthusiasm: '*a purely self-intending and self-contemplating activity, simply for the sake of acting and contemplating, without any other subject or object; without inherence, point of departure, purpose, or point of arrival*' (JMW, 511; JWA2, 205).⁷ Logical enthusiasm is a product of the understanding, an activity that finds pleasure and even bliss in its own creating activity – specifically, in the act of pure knowing for the sake of knowing alone – and does not care at all about whether the results of its reasoning correspond with the existential experiences and purposive actions of individual persons. In other words, logical enthusiasm results in creating a purely immanent world of concepts and schemes, a logically coherent system, a philosophy of one piece or an alone philosophy.

When logical enthusiasm reaches its apex in a completely immanent system of philosophy, the implications for our immediate, existential experience of reality are in keeping: we can only comprehend the world insofar as it is conceptualized, which means that it stops to have an objective existence apart from our concepts, and is

reduced to a product of our productive imagination. 'We appropriate the universe by tearing it apart, and create a *world of pictures, ideas, and words*, which is proportionate to our powers, but quite unlike the real one. ... Our philosophical understanding does not reach beyond its own creation' (JMW, 370, see also 501–502; JWA1, 249, see also JWA2, 194). This is the fundamental meaning of what Jacobi calls 'a *thoroughly immanent* philosophy, a philosophy of *one* piece, a veritable *system* of reason' (JMW, 507; JWA2, 200). The more philosophy yields to its propensity for logical enthusiasm, thereby strengthening the power of the universal and hence homogenizing concepts of the understanding, the more it annihilates our personal, existential and above all practical experience of reality. In sum, Jacobi accuses Hegel's alone philosophy of conceptual idolatry (JMW, 524–525; JWA2, 221).

The crucial question is then whether Jacobi's non-philosophy offers a viable philosophical alternative to Hegel's system. The start of this investigation is Jacobi's question: '*Is man in possession of reason, or is reason in possession of man?*' (JMW, 375; JWA1, 259). He defines the former as instrumental reason or, in his later works, as understanding, 'the soul of man *only* in so far as it has distinct concepts, passes judgments, and draws inferences with them, and goes on building new concepts or ideas' (JMW, 375; JWA1, 259). Jacobi explicitly acknowledges the practical importance of instrumental reason for our understanding of the sensuous world. In particular, by making use of language and abstraction the understanding is able to examine what is steady in the unsteadiness of nature that surrounds and permeates us. Thanks to these instruments the understanding can create concepts such as existence, substance, individuality, corporeal extension, succession, cause and effect. Yet, it is essential to realize that the objectivity of these concepts depends on what we experience through our senses. Hence, the objective world is not created *by* us, but revealed *to* us. In other words, the immediate certainty of individual, external things comes first and the conceptual reflection upon them, however important it is, is only secondary and can never replace or suspend these immediate certainties.

A similar balance has to be respected when it comes to our awareness of the supernatural world. Jacobi finds the same priority of immediate awareness over conceptual reflection in our existential experience of ourselves as free acting, individual persons as well as in our apprehension of God: He is not a pure concept, a construct of the understanding, but '*is outside me, a living, self-subsisting being,*' a living spirit (JMW, 524, see also 329; JWA2, 220; see also JWA2, 99). Therefore, Jacobi states: 'The supernatural cannot be apprehended by us in any way except as it is given to us, namely, *as fact – It is!*' (JMW, 376; JWA1, 261). He calls this awareness 'reason that is in possession of man' or (in his later works) 'substantive reason', thereby opposing it to the constructions of instrumental reason: 'If by reason we mean the principle of cognition in general, then reason is the spirit of which the whole living nature of man is made up; man *consists* of it. In this sense man is a form which reason has assumed' (JMW, 375; JWA1, 260). He defines substantive reason, in contrast to Kant's concept of reason, as 'a perceptive faculty of something divine, which is present *outside* and *above* man, and at the same time as a perceptive faculty of something divine, which is present *in* man, as this divine itself' (JWA3, 29; see also JMW, 522; JWA2, 218–219). Yet, to stave off a too simple religious interpretation of Jacobi's philosophy, it has to be noted

that our intimation of the unconditional and supernatural is not the result of a divine revelation, but rather we become aware of God through our experience of ourselves as free acting individual persons (Sandkaulen 2000: 262; Althof 2017: 184–185).

Given that the supernatural is revealed to us as a fact, as 'it is', the question crops up about the relation between reason as an immediate revelation and the instrumental knowledge of understanding and its concept. If the understanding would be our only intellectual capacity, this would result in annihilating the reality of the supernatural by reducing it to something purely conceptual. If that were the case, the inevitable consequence for Jacobi would be to refrain from conceptual knowledge altogether. The fact that he employed, in his earlier works, the term 'faith' for immediate awareness and opposed it massively to any conceptual clarification was the main cause that many of his contemporaries, including Hegel, accused him of misology and of turning reason into a burlesque verbal juggling (FK, 125; GuW, GW4, 367). However, in the *Introduction to his Collected Philosophical Works*, Jacobi corrected this misunderstanding by replacing the above opposition with the distinction between reason and understanding (JMW, 539–540; JWA2, 377). In another text, Jacobi describes the relation between understanding and reason as follows: 'The whole, un-fragmented, real and true human being is at the same time reasonable and rational [i.e. possesses understanding]; he believes undivided and with the same firm trust – in *God*, in *Nature*, and in his *own spirit*. This Trinitarian, generally unphilosophical faith must also be able to become a *philosophical* one in the strictest sense' (JWA3, 27n).

Let us now examine in more detail how Jacobi conceives the relation between substantive and instrumental reason (or simply between reason and understanding) when it comes to the conceptual clarification of (our intimation of) the supernatural. In Jacobi's view, just like the revelation of the sensuous world needs the understanding and its concepts to become objective knowledge, our immediate awareness of the supernatural cannot stand on its own, but has to be embedded in the understanding as well: 'Reason ought not to be given preference over the understanding, nor the understanding over reason ... Without the understanding, reason would not be of any use to us, the reasonable being itself would not be' (JMW, 547; JWA2, 386; see also JMW, 584; JWA2, 426). Jacobi conceives the relation between understanding and reason as that the former gives our thinking its conceptual form, whereas the latter gives it its content. Hence, the understanding plays an essential role when it comes to unifying the manifold revelations of the supernatural and to conceptually reflecting upon their deeper meaning.

The crucial question is, how can the understanding fulfil its conceptually clarifying role without yielding to logical enthusiasm, in other words, its natural propensity to replace immediate revelation by pure concepts and thus to become self-sufficient? To start with, one has to keep in mind the existential and personal nature of Jacobi's thinking.

In my judgment the greatest service of the scientist is to unveil *existence*, and to reveal it ... Explanation is a means for him, a pathway to his destination, a proximate – never a final goal. His final goal is what cannot be explained: the unanalyzable, the immediate, the simple ... Obsession with explanation makes

us seek what is common to all things so passionately that we pay no attention to diversity in the process; we only want always to join together, whereas it would often be much more to our advantage to separate.

(JMW, 194; JWA1, 29, ellipses in the original)

Whereas for Hegel existence is but a concept in his metaphysical logic, for Jacobi it is the focal point of his entire thinking (Sandkaulen 2019: 46–48). In his view, existence is not so much a well-defined philosophical concept as a way of indicating or hinting at the manifold, concrete ways in which living beings and especially humans lead their lives as individual ‘selves’, irreducible to each other. Because of this, concepts cannot explain, but only approximate the existential character of these beings. Our explanatory concepts can only grasp what is common to them (see above), but abstract from what is unique in every being and what makes it different from other ones. Hence, conceptual explanation is certainly not useless, but one should realize that it only yields approximate knowledge, so that it is always subordinate to the concrete experience of living beings and certainly cannot replace it. When it comes to understanding human beings in particular, Jacobi’s point of departure is the praxis of the individual scientist, which shows that he takes a participant’s rather than an observer’s perspective when speaking about concrete existence (Sandkaulen 2019: 46–53). This means that Jacobi’s philosophy should not be qualified as a pure empiricism, aimed at making the (immediate) experience philosophically relevant. Rather, he wants to uncover the close link between experience and the experiencing person to give the latter a philosophical weight. Precisely the person of the scientist risks to disappear in the transition from immediate experience to mediate knowledge, as clearly happens in Hegel’s system of philosophy. In other words, the concepts of the understanding, when left to their own inclination (i.e. logical enthusiasm), not only annihilate the objects of experience but also its subject, specifically, the experiencing person as an individual. Avoiding such an annihilation is for Jacobi not an epistemological, theoretical concern, as it is for Hegel, but a practical and existential one (Althof 2017: 195–196).

The question then is how Jacobi puts his ideas about the relation between the revelation of the sensuous and the supernatural world and its conceptualization into practice in his philosophy. It is obvious that ‘there is no purely speculative way to the awareness of God, speculation can only join [this awareness] and substantiate through its own nature that it is empty without these revelations; speculation can only *confirm*, but never *found* them’ (JWA1, 347–348; Althof 2017: 202–212). Therefore he uses, throughout his work, expressions such as ‘testifying to’, ‘hinting at’ or ‘referring to’ as ways to safeguard the practical character of our thinking about concrete existence through words and concepts, and to distinguish it as clearly as possible from the foundational thinking of alone philosophy. As a matter of fact, he takes a personal story, a conversation with someone, and other concrete instances of leading one’s life as starting points of his philosophizing; they are followed by a conceptual reflection, which respects the personal nature of these experiences and thus avoids overpowering them with massive, unifying concepts.

An excellent illustration of this approach is the story of Spertias and Bulis, which Jacobi recounts in his *Spinoza-letters*. Spertias and Bulis, two prominent Spartans, went to King

Xerxes to settle an issue, although they realized that it may cost their lives. Underway, they met Hydarnes, a Persian prefect over the peoples that lived in the coastal regions of Asia. He received them well and tried to persuade them to join Xerxes, and be just as grand and happy as he. However, Spertias and Bulis refused his offer because, so they said, 'your counsel ... befits *your* experience, but not *ours*. Had you tasted the happiness that we have enjoyed, you would advise us to sacrifice our possessions and our life for it' (JMW, 238; JWA1, 131). Jacobi tells this story to unveil the irreducible character of personal experiences and to show the shortcomings of a purely conceptual approach in existential matters. He does so by contrasting the personal stories of Spertias and Bulis with the theories of his contemporaries, advocates of alone philosophy. The latter would certainly ridicule Spertias and Bulis for considering their personal experiences as more valuable than philosophical arguments. Hegel, who comments in *Faith and Knowledge* on this passage, offers a good example of such a critique. In his view, Jacobi is

very hostile to objectivity and the concept in the interest of ethical beauty, [so that we] cannot do anything else but hold fast to the models in which he [Jacobi] meant to make his idea of ethical beauty clear. And the key-note of these models is this conscious lack of objectivity, this subjectivity holding fast to itself; not the constancy of tranquil self-possession, but of reflection on one's personality, an eternally returning introspective concern for the subject which puts extreme meticulousness, nostalgic egoism and ethical sickliness in the place of ethical freedom.

(FK, 146; GuW, GW4, 382)

However, this polemical comment shows that Hegel fails to appreciate why Jacobi focuses on the existential, personal characteristics of the protagonists, and why he pays so much attention to the way in which their actions are embedded in the lifeworld. In fact, Hegel reduces Jacobi's revelation of (ethical) truths through personal, existential stories to two pure concepts: subjectivity versus objectivity. By contrast, Jacobi's concrete, existential-practical approach enables him to testify to the fact that Spertias and Bulis were 'in possession of a truth that we lack. Would we not stop laughing at them, were we to find this very truth within us?' (JMW, 238; JWA1, 131). What Jacobi wants to reveal here is the existential, practical character of the truth of Spertias and Bulis and of their counterpart, Hydarnes: 'They [Spertias and Bulis] admitted that he [Hydarnes] was wise in his measure, understanding, and good. They did not try to teach him their truth; on the contrary, they explained why this could not be done' (JMW, 238; JWA1, 131).

Jacobi's highlighting of the contrasting character of the truths of these three men is intended to show that, if philosophy's aim is to unveil existence as it is concretely lived, it has to take into account the irreducibly personal character of the lifeworld, in which experience and truth are embedded, so that a philosophical system is unable to capture it conceptually. Therefore, Jacobi explains, Spertias and Bulis 'did not appeal to their understanding, to their fine judgment, but only to *things*, and their desire for them. Nor did they boast of any virtue; they only professed their heart's sentiment, their affection. They had no philosophy, or rather, their philosophy was just history' (JMW, 238; JWA 1, 132).

The last sentence shows that Jacobi does not content himself with just recounting this and other stories, but interprets them reflexively. This reflexive form enables him to express and substantiate their meaning philosophically. Yet, at the same time he is deeply aware of the limitations of this reflexive, conceptual approach. He formulates the balance between experience and reflection as follows: 'One ought not to derive the actions of men from their philosophy, but rather their philosophy from their actions; that their history does not originate from their way of thinking, but rather, their way of thinking from their history' (JMW, 239; JWA1, 133). As a philosopher, Jacobi uses a reflexive, conceptual form to substantiate his immediate convictions, but at the same time he keeps this philosophical form subordinate to the content he describes.

The example of Jacobi's uncovering of the truths, embedded in the concrete life stories of Spertias and Bulis and Hegel's conceptual reduction of these truths takes us to the core of Jacobi's contradiction of Hegel's system of philosophy. In a letter to his friend, Johann Neeb, from May 1817, Jacobi writes:

The difference between Hegel and me consists in that he surpasses Spinozism ('that substantial absolute, in which everything submerges, and in which all individual things are only suspended and wiped out') without a leap. In his view, Spinozism is the final true result of thinking, to which every logical philosophizing must lead. After having surpassed Spinozism he ends up in a system of freedom, thereby taking a still higher road of thinking, which is nevertheless the same (hence in essence not higher) [as Spinozism]. By contrast, I [aim to end up in freedom too, but] by means of a leap, a rash one, which departs from the springboard of mere substantial knowing, which Hegel also accepts and presupposes, but with which he wants to deal in a different way than I do.

(ABW2, 467–468)

In this passage Jacobi starts with repeating his basic conviction that Spinoza's 'substance is nothing but the invisible identity of object and subject ... upon which the system of the new philosophy is grounded, i.e. the system of the *independent philosophy of intelligence*' (JMW, 502; JWA2, 195). This shows that Jacobi's contradiction against modern philosophy not only regards Spinoza's substance-metaphysics but also Hegel's system of philosophy. Yet, whereas Spinoza's philosophy inevitably leads to fatalism, Hegel develops a system of freedom, so that at first sight Jacobi could have welcomed it, since his own philosophy ends up in freedom too. The reason he contradicts Hegel's philosophy nevertheless lies precisely in the fact that Hegel develops a *system* of freedom, which results in an abstract idea of freedom because it is driven by the spirit of syllogism. For Jacobi, Hegel shows in a paradigmatic way that his system of philosophy excludes or represses the individual person and her/his existential-practical free actions because these immediate expressions of freedom are suspended in Hegel's system and only retained in their conceptual form, namely in a mediated way. In Jacobi's view this systematic, conceptual approach is utterly unable to perceive the immediate feeling of freedom as the essence of a person's concrete existence; this immediate feeling enables a person to keep his word and thus to be honourable. Someone who puts his honour at stake is committed to a case as a free, individual person, so that he is answerable to

his way of life, which is oriented towards the good. Therefore, others can trust him too (Sandkaulen 2019: 89–90). ‘Will a real being endowed with reason be so driven into a corner by the *abstractum of his reason*? Will he let himself be made such a total prisoner through a mere play of words? Not for a moment! If honour is to be *trusted*, and if a man can *keep his word*, then quite another spirit must dwell in him than the spirit of syllogism’ (JMW, 347; JWA1, 166).⁸

The question of the free acts of the concrete human person points to another aspect of the above quote, which highlights even more the gap that separates the philosophical projects of Hegel and Jacobi. As argued above, the reason why ‘suspension’ is a central element in Hegel’s (system of) philosophy is that it substantiates his claim that the absolute, as the self-production of reason, shapes itself into an objective totality. In contrast to Spinoza’s idea of the absolute as a substance, Hegel conceives the absolute as self-development, namely, not only as substance but also as subject (PS, 10; PhG, GW9, 18). To guarantee that suspension can fulfil its crucial task in Hegel’s dialectical approach of the absolute, it is essential that nothing ‘actual’ is being lost, that all that is actually true can be understood and thus retained as a moment of truth from a higher, more encompassing conceptual perspective. Precisely this is what Jacobi contradicts: for him suspension means submergence instead of elevation, wiping out instead of retaining. His prime concern is to avoid that the concrete, free acts of individual persons are being annihilated by means of a conceptual mediation. Therefore, Jacobi replaces Hegel’s idea of suspension by that of a leap. In contrast to Hegel’s idea that every determination of being and thought is nothing but a suspensible moment in the necessary development of the absolute idea, Jacobi conceives his leap as the free, personal decision by the philosopher F.H. Jacobi, which cannot be suspended conceptually. Hegel, from his part, appreciates the fact that Jacobi has introduced the idea of the absolute as a living (and hence self-developing), free and personal spirit into the philosophical debate of his time (SuE, GW15, 11) but deplores that he refuses to go beyond the immediate intuition of this spirit and to suspend it in conceptual knowledge:

Since J[acobi] throws away the *mediation*, which is present in knowing, and does not restore it as *belonging* to the nature of the spirit, as its essential moment, his *consciousness of the absolute spirit* remains stuck in the form of *immediate* and purely *substantial* knowing ... Yet, if the intuition of the absolute knows itself as an *intellectual*, i.e. as knowing intuition, and if, moreover, the object and content of this intuition is not the fixed substance, but the *spirit*, then the pure form of the substantiality of knowing, namely its immediacy, should also be thrown away.

(SuE, GW15, 13)

Conclusion

Following up on the end of the previous section, I want to analyse in more detail why Hegel was so much intrigued by Jacobi’s philosophical project. It is notable that he credits Jacobi for expressing some ‘ingenious’ (*geistreich*) ideas. He introduces this term to make clear that Jacobi writes in an aphoristic way about all kinds of spiritual

matters beyond the finitude of reflective thinking, but he criticizes Jacobi for refusing to think these matters conceptually and in their necessary coherence as moments of the spirit (FK, 117; GuW, GW4, 361–362). In his *Review of the Third Volume of Jacobi's Works*, Hegel explains his appreciation for the wealth of ingenious phrasings and images in more detail. Despite that

the *ingenious* is a kind of *surrogate* of a methodical and fully formed thinking and of the reason that progresses in such a thinking, ... the merit of these fortunate intuitions and significant inventions should not only not be underestimated, but we may enjoy these intuitions and inventions insofar as they are there to boost through senses and representations the thought and the spiritual ... Yet, even though the twilight of the ingenious is charming because the light of the idea shines through it, it loses this merit where the light of reason radiates.

(SuE, GW15, 23–24)

From Hegel's perspective, the genuine, if limited, merit of Jacobi's ingenious ideas lies in their heuristic role for the awareness of the spiritual. Jacobi offers to his readers a wealth of ingenious phrases and images, through which the profundity of the spiritual comes to the fore in its clarity and simplicity (SuE, GW15, 23–24). Hence, the significance of these phrases and images for Hegel's system of philosophy is in a certain sense comparable with that of artistic images of religious representations, which also offer non-conceptual intimations of the spiritual.

Yet, to my mind Hegel's reference to Jacobi's ingenious phrases and images points to another matter that is far more unsettling for his system of philosophy, as they give Hegel, just like many other representatives of alone philosophy, a bad conscience (Gawoll 2008: 29). This is already conveyed by Fichte's quote that serves as the title of this chapter, but it applies to Hegel's relation with Jacobi too. Hegel tries to disarm the unsettling character of Jacobi's non-philosophy by integrating it into his own philosophical system, but eventually he does not succeed. That he may have been aware of this failure explains why Jacobi's thinking serves for him as a bad conscience.

To uncover the unsettling role of Jacobi's ingenious phrases and images for Hegel, let me start with a famous text of September 1800, in which Hegel conceives life as a driving force that is able to overcome the oppositions of the understanding in an organic way, so that it serves as a counterweight against the reflection, which annihilates the unity of life through its concepts. In this fragment, Hegel explains the impossibility of the reflection, and by extension of philosophy as such, to understand life as an encompassing unity:

Every expression whatsoever is a product of reflection, and therefore it is possible to demonstrate in the case of every expression that, when reflection propounds it, another expression, not propounded, is excluded. Reflection is thus driven on and on without rest; but this process must be checked once and for all by keeping in mind that ... [the living whole] has a character of its own, namely, that of being a reality beyond all reflection.

(ETW, 312; FS, GW2, 344)

Although there are no explicit references to Jacobi's works in Hegel's early writings, this and many other texts show that Jacobi's ideas had a profound influence on him. This influence regards in particular Jacobi's views on the opposition between reflection and the unity of life, which can only be revealed to man through an immediate awareness: through faith (Althof 2017: 45–47). To show how important this problem was for Hegel, he testifies a few months later in a personal way to the tension between immediate awareness and reflection, and his struggle to overcome it:

In my scientific development, which started from the more subordinate needs of man, I was inevitably driven toward science, and the ideal of my youth had to take the form of reflection and thus at once of a system. I now ask myself, while I am still occupied with it, what return to intervention in the life of men can be found.

(LE, 64; *Briefe* I, 59–60)

This text also shows Hegel's awareness of the opposition between the spiritual ideal of his youth and the need to express it conceptually, which explains why he asked himself if and how the living spirit could be rendered appropriately in a philosophical system (Sandkaulen 2002: 364, 368–369). This youth ideal is a spiritual and practical one; it consists in educating the people to the advent of the Kingdom of God, not conceived in an ecclesiastical, doctrinal sense but as unity of life which would bring individual and social freedom, harmony and happiness to humankind.

However, shortly after he had written the above letter, Hegel recognizes that it had become impossible to realize this ideal directly through an education of the people because the needs of the times had changed. He realizes that his time is in need of reflection as the instrument of philosophizing because the power of the understanding has been steadily increasing, so that 'the strivings of life to give birth once more to its harmony [have] become more meaningless' (DIFF, 92; DIFF., GW4, 14). The understanding has built a 'splendid edifice' between humankind and the absolute, so that the absolute as a living whole is lost out of sight. However, 'the more stable and splendid the edifice of the understanding is, the more restless becomes the striving of the life that is caught up in it as a part to get out of it, and raise itself to freedom' (DIFF., 90; DIFF., GW4, 13). This means that, in Hegel's view, the unity of life cannot be restored anymore through an immediate, non-reflexive intuition, as Jacobi thought, but only by means of speculative reason because it is the only instance that is able to attack the understanding in its own realm (DIFF, 92; DIFF., GW4, 15). At the end of a fragment of one of his lectures, written in the autumn of 1801, he expresses his struggle to clarify the complex relationship between life as a living unity and the capacity of philosophy to grasp this conceptually in the following way:

As far as the need for philosophy is concerned, we want to try to elucidate it in the form of an answer to the question: which relationship has philosophy with life? This question is identical with the question to what extent is philosophy practical?, since the intention of the true need for philosophy is no other than to learn how to live from it and through it. (SuE, GW5, 261)⁹

In sum, in these crucial, formative years the ultimate goal of Hegel's philosophical project is not to create a philosophical system, but to intervene in the life of men, which means that philosophy has to be practical. However, he is also keenly aware of the risk that, as soon as philosophy takes on the form of a systematic reflection, it may lose this connection with life, and thus its capacity to intervene in it. As we have seen, Hegel accepted that risk and hence opted for a different way out of the deadlock of his times, in particular to withstand the power of the understanding to annihilate the living unity of life, than Jacobi. Nevertheless, Hegel remained sensitive to the fact that the understanding might eventually take the upper hand and annihilate this unity as well as philosophy's capacity to intervene in life practically. Against this background it is no wonder that Jacobi's ingenious phrases and images showed Hegel the possibility of realizing his youth-ideal in a completely different way. Hegel might even have considered the possibility that Jacobi's approach could oppose the power of the understanding more effectively. Therefore, Jacobi's writings may have served for Hegel as a bad conscience against what may be lost on the long road from spirit to system.

Notes

- 1 Jacobi (1981–), *Briefwechsel. Gesamtausgabe*. Henceforth quoted as JBW and the number of the volume.
- 2 Jacobi (1998–), *Werke. Gesamtausgabe*. Henceforth quoted as JWA and the number of the volume.
- 3 Jacobi (1827), *Auserlesener Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, 303. Henceforth quoted as ABW. See also Jacobi's first letter to Köppen on the occasion of the publication of Hegel's *Faith and Knowledge* in JWA2, 338.
- 4 For the English translations of Jacobi's works, if available, I used Jacobi (2009), *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (henceforth JMW).
- 5 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Miller's translation.
- 6 See also SuE, GW5, 265: 'Without entering into the opposition, its suspension is not possible. Suspending it [the opposition], not ignoring or abstracting from it is absolute knowing.'
- 7 In his review of *Woldemar*, F. Schlegel accused Jacobi of a lack of logical enthusiasm. Jacobi found that this accusation hit the nail on the head, and took it as a characterization of his main difference with Fichte's 'alone philosophy' (JMW, 504 n; JWA2, 196 n).
- 8 In a footnote, Jacobi adds: 'Man's reason, abstracted from man himself and from every incentive, is a mere *ens rationis* that can neither act nor react, neither think nor act.' In the same footnote he refers to his fundamental distinction between instrumental reason, which shows that abstract reason has only a limited purport, and substantive reason, which he holds 'to be the breath of God in the work of clay' (JWA1, 166).
- 9 For an analysis of the relation between religion and philosophy in Hegel's early works, see Jonkers (1998: 210–216).

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Self-Thinking Consciousness or Absolute Spirit: Hegel's Response to Fichte's Definition of Philosophy

Sebastian Stein

Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.

—Heraclitus (2001)

Introduction

The notion of philosophy has undergone a rather substantial change during the development of post-Kantian idealism. While Kant insists on the universal and eternal value of (his) philosophy's claims (Kant 1991: 26), he contrasts finite philosophical thought as something undertaken by finite individuals in the phenomenal realm from what he calls divine 'intellectual intuition' (Kant 2000: 271–279) that would only be possible in the unknowable, noumenal realm beyond finitude.

Reacting to Kant, Fichte worries about the allegedly knowledge-limiting consequences of Kant's radical differentiation between a phenomenal and a noumenal realm: if truth is noumenal and thus unconditioned but thinkers and their philosophizing are phenomenal and conditioned, thinkers cannot know unconditioned truth in the manner philosophy must imply. To avoid this alleged contradiction, Fichte rejects the realms' radical distinction and defines philosophy as 'finite thinkers having an intellectual intuition of unconditioned truth'. Insofar as finite philosophers participate in the same unconditioned truth that also posits itself as them, philosophy is the truth that comprehends itself in the act of thinkers' philosophizing.

However, to protect the particular philosopher's autonomy in the face of universal truth's ultimate causality, Fichte argues that philosophy is primarily the activity of fallible thinkers rather than of universal truth: while philosophical knowledge is unconditioned, universal and objective, it is something that individuals strive for (Fichte 2005: 37) rather than what they possess beyond legitimate doubt:

As long as someone does not comprehend god and its appearance, he fails to understand the nature of thought and the innermost independence of mind,

instead, he remains a victim of opinion and fails to be an autonomous thinker all his life, rather remaining an attachment to a stranger's thinking, he is forever lacking the most excellent spiritual organ that mind possesses.

(Fichte 1971a: 417)

In response, Hegel argues that Fichte's definition of philosophy entails that philosophical knowledge remains eternally possible but is never actual: if philosophy is fundamentally something undertaken by finite philosophers who differ from truth, the thinkers could always err. Crucially, Hegel argues, this also undermines Fichte's own claim about philosophy's fallibility: if all philosophical knowledge is possibly mistaken, then Fichte's philosophical claim about what philosophy is might be equally mistaken. Fichte thus lays claim to true knowledge beyond doubt while arguing that such knowledge is unobtainable. This can only be avoided by defining philosophy as knowledge proper rather than as a striving for or a love of knowledge: 'The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of science – to the goal of its being able to give up the name of *love of knowledge* and become *actual knowledge*' (PS, 6).¹

To avoid the self-undermining of philosophical knowledge claims, Hegel defines philosophy as unconditioned truth's ('absolute *Geist*') self-comprehension. 'Philosophy' is universal truth (*Geist*) that comprehends itself (is absolute) in and through the thoughts of particular thinkers, which in turn ensures the validity of this very definition of philosophy: like all other philosophical claims, Hegel's definition of philosophy lays claim to being unconditionally true. However, Hegel's argument raises the question about the autonomy of the finite philosopher that Fichte was so concerned to defend: does Hegel's notion of philosophy reduce the finite thinker to being a dependent means for universal truth's self-comprehending activity?

In an attempt to address this question, it will be argued that Hegel's account of *Geist* is inherently speculative and thus designed to unite truth's universality and thinkers' particularity without undermining the status of either: both the universal principle *Geist* and particular *geistige* thinkers are logically simultaneous, implicate each other and assume each other's properties. Whether Hegel's account of philosophy ultimately succeeds in uniting universal truth and particular thinking depends on the validity of what Hegel calls 'the concept'.

Fichte

I and Non-I

Fichte's discussion of philosophy rests on an unconditioned metaphysical principle that he defines as the unity of the subject and object that Kant places within what he calls the 'transcendental unity of consciousness'. Fichte labels it the free 'I' (Fichte 1997: 30)² and argues that this 'I' posits itself and then confronts itself with its own negation called 'Non-I' (Fichte 1997: 24–26) so that 'the [dialectical] unity of "I" and "Non-I"' (Fichte 1971c: 30) becomes the inherently dynamic foundation of his philosophical system (Hoeltzel 2019).

As origin of all consciousness, the free, universal and unconditioned I posits³ all undetermined elements of reality. Meanwhile, the Non-I manifests as everything that consciousness confronts as objective and determined. This includes the consciousness-external world, the body with its drives, other conscious beings' externality, etc. (Fichte 1971c: 24). Since the I is metaphysically 'first', and posits the Non-I, it enables compatibility with the Non-I: the Non-I *is* the I, albeit in self-negated form. Yet, the I still finds itself irreducibly differentiated from the Non-I (Fichte 1971c: 91–123): although the Non-I *is* the I, the Non-I cannot be reduced to the I.⁴

This is supposed to avoid the absorption of one moment into the other: if ultimately, everything were the I, objectivity, including the objectivity of the I, would be a mere illusion. If ultimately, everything were objective, free consciousness and its knowledge would be illusory (Fichte 1997: 76). The relationship between Fichte's I and Non-I can thus be described as '*being one and yet, two*': I and Non-I are identical due to their common origin in the I, and yet, they remain differentiated and mutually delineating.⁵

Fichte then distinguishes two varieties of the unity of I and Non-I: (1) the 'universal consciousness' (Fichte 1971c: 15) of the 'universal I' as transcendental, unconditioned principle that posits itself as (2) 'empirical I' that is the concrete, self-conscious individual. In the empirical form, the I confronts the posited Non-I and strives to identify with it by means of cognition: empirical knowledge is the result of the I's identification with the Non-I. While the universal I defines the categorial framework that transcendently grounds the empirical I's cognitive activity, the cognizing, empirical I relies on its sensible intuitions to form representations to then organize and understand the Non-I's consciousness-external objectivity.

Intellectual intuition

However, Fichte also argues that there is a second, non-sensual kind of intuition (Fichte 2005: 60) that communicates non-empirical knowledge. He follows Kant in calling it 'intellectual intuition' (Fichte 1994: 31) but profoundly changes its meaning: according to Fichte, Kant's notion of intellectual intuition refers to the impossible ability to immediately comprehend Kant's supersensible and unthinkable 'thing in itself': '[Kant claims that intellectual intuition is] the immediate consciousness of non-sensible being; the immediate consciousness of the thing in itself, and this only through mere thinking; it is thus a creation of the thing in itself through the concept' (Fichte 1971e: 471–472).

Since intellectual intuition is impossible if one assumes Kant's separation of the noumenal and the phenomenal, Fichte rejects this 'dualism'⁶ and argues that the supersensible does not reside in an inaccessible, noumenal realm⁷ beyond individual thinkers' grasp (Fichte 2005: 98). If this were the case, no reasonable and thus philosophical claim could be made about it (Fichte 1997: 16–17). Instead, Fichte traces everything supersensible to the I while defining everything sensible in terms of the Non-I. The unity of these principles is within intellectual reach (Fichte 1986: 268ff) of finite thinkers because this unity transcendently defines thinkers and their world through its positing activity.⁸ The original, self- and Non-I positing

activity of the universal I can thus be intellectually grasped by the particular thinker's (self-)consciousness in a singular act of intellectual insight that has intuition-like unity because the thinker always already participates in the universal I's positing activity.

Fichte's 'intellectual intuition' (Fichte 1971e: 463) thus has two facets: it is the particular thinker's immediate, *thought-based* and thus non-sensual comprehension of the activity⁹ of the universal I. And since the universal I and the thinker are united, this is also the self-comprehension of universal consciousness that takes place through the thinking activity of the particular thinker. This notion of intellectual intuition thus entails that the particular, 'empirical I' – the (self-)conscious, particular thinker – and the universal I as origin of the equally universal Non-I, are *identified*: the intellectually intuiting, finite thinker partakes in the self- and world-positing and the self-thinking of the universal I.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the universal I is able to comprehend itself due to the activity of the finite, conscious thinker.¹¹ The universal I is thus alive (Fichte 1971d: 696) and comprehends itself as what it is in the thinking activity of the finite, philosophical thinkers.¹²

While Fichte is adamant that ultimately, each particular thinker must create her/his own image of philosophical truth and freely decide to think it (Fichte 2005: 63), the act of doing philosophy can be motivated by another person, for example, a teacher or a philosopher (Fichte 2005: 29), so that the decision to think for oneself can be motivated and inspired but never be made by another.¹³ Ultimately, every philosopher thus has to do her/his own thinking and trace the necessary and singular (Fichte 2005: 24) determinations of philosophical truth in virtue of the freedom that is enabled by one's participation in the I's freedom.

This claim rests on Fichte's more fundamental argument that the particular philosopher is both an irreducible manifestation¹⁴ of *and* a condition for universal reason's (that is the universal I or universal consciousness) self-thinking: the particular, self-conscious thinker philosophically comprehends the workings of the universal I because the universal I posits itself as the empirical I and the universal I comprehends itself because the particular I determines itself to think philosophically.¹⁵ The particular thinker's freedom originates in the I while the I's particularity is defined by thinkers' decisions.

The universal I thus spontaneously thinks itself in the particular thinker *and* the particular thinker spontaneously enables the universal I's self-thinking: when the particular, free thinker takes the decision to think philosophically, it enables the universal I's ('reason's') self-thinking (Fichte 1971b: 18). At the same time, the particular thinker's decision to think is grounded in and enabled through the universal I's self-positing activity.

The thinker's act of philosophical thinking thus *is* universal consciousness' act of self-positing but, at the same time, Fichte insists that they differ: universal consciousness is infinite while particular consciousness is finite. If the thinker's philosophizing could be exhaustively explained with reference to universal consciousness' thinking, the particular thinker would have no independent agency. However, if the two were not related at all, the universal I's self-determining could not be transferred to the thinker.

Fichte's conscious, particular thinker thus philosophizes because universal consciousness posits itself as thinking consciousness and universal consciousness posits itself as philosophizing consciousness because the particular, conscious thinker philosophizes. The particular thinker is thus an irreducibly *active* aspects of universal consciousness' (or 'reason's')¹⁶ process of self-positing. The causality goes both ways: universal consciousness' self-comprehension results from the finite thinker's 'leap-like' (Fichte 1994: 215) decision to think philosophically and vice versa. To Fichte's intellectually intuiting, philosophizing individual, philosophical reason becomes a 'living image' (Fichte 1986: 113) since reason is the individual's own, living activity of thought:

In this self-permeation and being permeated by itself, reason shows itself in us, as reason about reason, that is absolute reason. – [So philosophy] is doctrine of reason [and it is through] itself, of itself, in itself ... [It is] doctrine of reason, as the first and highest part [of the science of knowing]. [It] is not in the process of becoming but it is in itself, and it is what it is.

(Fichte 1986: 269)

Intellectual intuition thus enables a kind of knowledge that a finite subject has about the universal I and that the universal I has about itself. Fichte refers to this process also as a 'knowing of knowing',¹⁷ indicating that philosophical truth is known through a concept forged by a finite thinker that differs from universal truth. At the same time, since the thinker is united with truth, the truth knows itself through the thinker's concept of the truth while the thinker knows this about the truth.

However, insofar as the finite thinker remains irreducibly differentiated from the intuited truth,¹⁸ thinker and philosophical truth are not actually united but they *ought* to be: the best that the particular thinker can do is to *strive* (Fichte 1997: 97–98) to philosophically comprehend the universal I's activity and the sensible and supersensible structures it gives rise to. So while Fichte argues that universal and particular consciousness are the same, he insists that they also always differ, thus ensuring particular consciousness' independence from universal consciousness' causality.

Knowledge and god

It might be this irreducible difference that gives rise to a higher-order notion of truth that Fichte mentions. Apart from the workings of the universal I that informs and enables the thinking of all individuals and that can be intellectually intuited, Fichte identifies another kind of non-empirical, unconditioned truth.¹⁹ In contrast to the universal I and despite Fichte's rejection of Kant's notion of an unknowable thing in itself, this truth may not be comprehended²⁰ in its actual form. Fichte calls it 'god' (Fichte 1971a: 442; 1971d: 696) and insists that it remains differentiated from all universal and particular (self-)consciousness and its knowledge. This difference between god and consciousness' realm of appearance is rooted in the notion that the

realm of universal and particular consciousness is but an 'articulation' and 'externality' of god, rather than how god truly is:

Philosophy as a Science of Knowing ... proceeds from knowledge as such, in its unity that appears to it as Being ... Only one thing is merely through itself: god. ... [Because] through his Being, all Being is and all possible Being is given and no Being can emerge within or outside of him. But knowledge is supposed to be real, and it is not supposed to be god itself. So it can only be god because there is only god but it must be god as out of himself; [it must be] god's being outside of himself; [it must be] his expression in which he is completely how he is and in which he remains with himself entirely how he is.

(Fichte 1971d: 696)

This suggests that god and all consciousness as appearance of god are thus *one and yet, they are two*:²¹ without god, nothing sensible and supersensible could and would be and yet, all finite being, including universal and individual consciousness with their implied reference-to-other, differs from god's infinite self-sufficiency. So while the universal consciousness (universal I) and its categorial forms are aspects of the same realm of god's appearance as the particular thinker and can therefore be comprehended by the thinkers, god is beyond appearance and finite comprehension.²² There accordingly exists a knowledge-grounding identity-relationship between particular thinker's (self-)consciousness and universal consciousness that is rooted in thinkers' status as 'appearance' while it does not exist between self-conscious thinker and universal consciousness on the one hand and god on the other.

The relationship between consciousness' realm of appearance and god can thus be described in terms of identity and difference: universal and individual self-consciousness and their empirical and philosophical knowledge are *identical* with god insofar as they are *god's* appearance: god appears as universal and empirical consciousness and its world. But at the same time, consciousness and its world differ from god²³ insofar as they are just god's *appearance*²⁴ and not how god *truly* is. Since knowledge relationships are grounded in identity, Fichte's denial that god could be known privileges the difference between god and the realm of appearance over their identity.

What does this entail for Fichte's notion of philosophy and its relationship to the absolute truth that he calls god?

Philosophy as self-knowing of the truth

Fichte's claims about the identity of god and appearance and his simultaneous insistence on their duality seem to create a problem with respect to his notion of philosophical knowledge. On the one hand, Fichte's philosophical thinker knows of the truth in its form as universal consciousness (or 'universal I'). On the other hand, the thinker does not know of the truth as it truly is, that is *as god* (Fichte 1997: 41–43). The philosophical knowledge that an individual philosopher can have is thus not knowledge of truth and thus not knowledge of truth about itself. But what is it then?

It seems that only the notions of the thinker's striving²⁵ for truth remains, which might just equate to ignorance, opinion²⁶ or faith: if knowledge of god's unconditioned truth cannot be actually had, then truth is never known. Philosophers remain ignorant about truth and can at best entertain opinions or beliefs about it. However, insofar as Fichte argues that all being and thus also all appearance, including the philosophers, can be traced back to god, philosophy is an opinion by god about god. Since god is defined as all-knowing truth and can only have knowledge and not opinion, god would have self-knowledge *and* not have it, which seems contradictory.

A similar problem arises with Fichte's notion of philosophical knowledge: it makes universal claims about the status of god and its appearance. However, since it is itself placed in the realm of appearance, it remains opinion and could be wrong. Consequently, Fichte's philosophical claim that philosophy could be wrong, could itself be wrong. So on the one hand, Fichte lays claim to infallible knowledge about the realm of appearance and about god's status beyond it. At the same time, he denies that such infallible knowledge is available to finite thinkers such as himself. To avoid this contradiction, philosophy would have to be defined as knowledge of god since it is only at this level of truth that claims are defined as true beyond doubt or opinion.

However, this would undermine Fichte's notion of philosophy as part of the realm of appearance. It would identify the knowing philosopher with god and assign an entirely different status to philosophical knowledge than what Fichte allows for. If philosophical knowledge is to live up to its own implication of being universally valid and thus non-self-contradictory knowledge of truth, its subject and object must be fundamentally identical. In our role as realizers and realization ('appearance') of god, 'we' as individual thinkers would have to participate in god's self-knowledge if we want to have the kind of true knowledge that enables us to know the unconditioned categorial structures of consciousness and reality.

In contrast, Fichte's description of the relationship between appearance-bound philosophy and unknowable god seems to be motivated by a dualistically informed notion of a limitation of philosophical knowledge. Akin to empirical knowledge, Fichte's philosophical knowledge is '(self-)limited':²⁷ the philosopher as knowing subject is limited by god as an unknowable object.

This limitation can be challenged in the following manner: since ultimately, only the truth exists, any limit can only be posited by the truth. However, this makes the limit a part of truth and thus *not* a limitation of it (Fichte 1986: 278). Since philosophy must be knowledge of the truth about itself to avoid the self-undermining possibility of error about philosophical truth, the same would have to apply to the limitation: what might appear as limitation of knowledge to the *erring* individual thinker cannot be a limitation for the *knowing* individual who is thinking the truth as it truly is. Such a successful philosophical thinker would comprehend all seeming limitations as articulations of the truth and philosophy's status as an unconditioned report on the truth. The claim that philosophical knowledge is limited is thus limited itself and not unconditionally true in the manner it must be to avoid self-contradiction.

If, at the same time, Fichte wants to protect the notion of a difference between the thinking philosopher and god to avoid undermining the thinker's autonomous agency, this difference would have to be accommodated within the overarching,

knowledge-enabling unity of thinker and god. Such a modification of Fichte's account of philosophy would imply a primacy of the unity of individual philosopher and truth by championing the kind of difference-respecting identity of I and Non-I that Fichte was missing in Kant's 'dualism' (Fichte: 1986: 76). This account of philosophy would also be compatible with Fichte's overall project insofar as he speaks of an overarching 'unity' of differentiated moments within the truth and philosophy and regularly emphasizes the need for the systematicity of philosophy (Fichte 1997: 198).

Finite philosopher and infinite truth

To avoid the kind of duality and difference between thinker and truth that undermines knowledge, Fichte could thus define philosophy as god's self-knowing in the following manner: philosophy is the truth as a unified and internally differentiated subject-object that knows itself as subject-object. The truth would then be the subject of knowing and the object of knowledge. It would be one truth that is internally differentiated into unconditioned universality and universality-tracking particularity (Fichte 1997: 279): particular thinkers think universal truth, which is equivalent to universal truth thinking itself.

The difference between finite thinkers and universal truth would then be maintained so that the subject does not lose its self-determination in the way Fichte thinks happens with 'dogmatic' Spinozism.²⁸ At the same time, truth is properly objective, thus avoiding subjectivism, and subject and object are compatible due to their overarching unity.

This definition of philosophy as truth's self-thinking would still be compatible with Fichte's claim that from the perspective of particular, empirical consciousness (Fichte 1997: 15), thoughts are often distorted, fragmented, incomplete (Fichte 1997: 76–77) or hazy (Fichte 1997: 8–9). Truth-oriented, finite thinking may still regularly fall short of philosophy's conceptual standard of truthfulness: the thoughts of finite thinkers often only incompletely articulate the self-knowledge of truth, making finite thinkers mere 'historiographers' (Fichte 1997: 77) and not 'legislators' (Fichte 1997: 77) of reason.

However, the empirical failure to live up to philosophy's conceptual standard does not need to entail the principled impossibility of doing philosophy successfully. Instead, the philosophical definition of philosophy defines the standard that thinkers need to live up to or fail by. To be able to succeed at all, thinkers need to have philosophical knowledge in principle, which requires a philosophical definition of philosophy as a unity of the truth as subject and the truth as object of knowledge that incorporates the particular thinker (Fichte 1997: 43).

God and method

Yet, Fichte's insistence on the irreducible difference between the I as finite subject and the truth as god might have methodological roots. The objective truth of god as it truly is in and for itself might thus be beyond the method of philosophy (Fichte 1997: 41–43) because Fichte argues that philosophy relies on finite thinkers' reflection,²⁹ abstraction and representation (Fichte 1997: 11). To him, these methods imply that the thinker that searches for philosophical truth abstracts and takes the sensual content away from his representations to arrive at the categories of philosophy posits a difference between

himself and the content of thought when he relies on reflection and representation.³⁰ To the finite philosopher, the truth as god is thus always something re-presented or something objectively – and thus externally – given to be reflected on.

This undermines the actual unity of god's unconditioned truth and the finite thinker: the methods of representation and reflection prioritize the difference between thinker and truth and thus sabotage the notion of their knowledge-grounding unity from the very beginning. In his attempt to preserve the individual thinker and its autonomy within universal truth's self-reference, Fichte dissolves the unity of finite thinker and truth (Fichte 1994: 77, 193). Despite his demand for a knowledge-guaranteeing unity, Fichte thus ends up opting for the dominance of difference when he (1) insists on the irreducible 'otherness' of the absolute as god in its relation to its own appearance, (2) defines the Non-I as radically and irreducibly different from the I despite the I's positing of the Non-I, and (3) describes the finite thinker as different from the cognized world and known philosophical truth, although the thinker is supposed to be able to know it. So while Fichte continuously insists on the activity of the I as guarantor of unity – (1) the I posits itself and the Non-I, (2) the I posits itself as limited by the Non-I, and (3) the thinker learns about and knows objective states of affairs – there ultimately remains an irreducible, unity- and knowledge-undermining difference-based otherness between the moments as Fichte defines them.

Going beyond Fichte's own project, one may ask how this issue could be treated differently without losing Fichte's central insights into the need to avoid subjectivist and objectivist dogmatism where either objectivity of subjectivity is reduced to its respective other.

Hegel

Idea and Geist

To remedy what he perceives as Fichte's shortcomings, Hegel thus argues against Fichte's commitment to the moments' irreducible difference and a dualism of universal truth on the one hand and the philosophers' particularity on the other: to Hegel, there is no philosophical knowledge and thus no knowledge of unconditioned truth unless truth and thinker are always already united *from the outset* (EPM, §577).³¹ Since Hegel thinks that Fichte ultimately prioritizes the universal subjectivity of the I over the Non-I's particular objectivity, thereby undermining the latter, Hegel labels Fichte's idealism 'subjective' (EL, §45 A)³² and his own idealism 'absolute' (PR, §27)³³ with reference to his notion of a self-referential conceptual unity that rests on a commitment to the simultaneity of subjectivity and objectivity.

Hegel's syllogisms of philosophy

More specifically, Hegel describes the conceptual meaning of his idealism and of his notion of philosophy in the *Encyclopaedia's* §§572–577, where he discusses philosophy in terms of three progressively improved syllogisms (EPM, §572).

These represent three different ways of conceptualizing the activity of philosophizing and its relationship to unconditioned truth that Hegel calls the 'idea' (EPM, §575) that comes in three forms. These are the (1) logical, (2) natural, and (3) *geistig*/spiritual idea (EL, §18; EPM §575).³⁴

The Idea is what is true in and for itself, the absolute unity of [the concept's subjectivity] and objectivity. Its ideal content is nothing but the [concept] in its determinations; its real content is only the presentation that the [concept] gives itself in the form of external thereness; and since this figure is included in the ideality of the [concept], or in its might, the [concept] preserves itself in it.

(EL, §213)

The concept

The idea's structure has its origin in what Hegel calls 'the concept' (EL, §160). As Hegel's most profound ontological commitment, this also constitutes his most basic solution to the problem of how to conceptually unite Fichte's I and Non-I. Within Hegel's concept, the purely logical equivalent to Fichte's I is universality and the equivalent to Fichte's Non-I is particularity:

The [concept] as such contains the moment of universality, as free equality with itself in its determinacy; it contains the moment of particularity, or of the determinacy in which the [universal] remains serenely equal to itself; and it contains the moment of singularity, as the inward reflection of the determinacies of universality and particularity. This singular negative unity with itself is what is in and for itself determined, and at the same time identical with itself or universal.

(EL, §163)

As Fichte did with the I, so Hegel defines the concept as free, only this time, freedom incorporates the Non-I and thus particularity as an irreducible but integrated, ontological moment: 'The concept is the free. [It is] as the substantial might that is for itself and that is totality because every of its moment is the whole and is posited in undivided unity with it' (EL, §160).

The concept's moments are differentiated *in being united* in such a manner that the differentiation between universality and particularity, so important to Fichte in his aspiration to avoid dogmatism, is retained. Yet, in their difference, the moments are simultaneously identified within the idea's unity. Hegel thus aims to preserve the moments' difference along with their mutual mediation within an overarching identity.

Hegel's syllogisms of philosophy: The first

The concept thus determines the idea, and since Hegel's syllogisms of philosophy are themselves configurations of the idea, they are themselves true (EPM, §575) so that each syllogism represents an idea-based way in which the idea's forms relate to

each other. Since *Geist* is one of the idea's forms and the finite, *geistige* philosopher that comprehends the truth's forms is part of *Geist*'s self-positing, each syllogism of philosophy describes one way in which individual philosophers philosophically relate to unconditioned truth.

Hegel's first syllogism corresponds to the linear reading of Hegel's encyclopaedic system and defines philosophy as the conceptual tracing of the transition of the logical idea into the idea as nature and from nature into the idea as *Geist*. All these developments are supposed to be conceptually necessary and to be shown as such by means of dialectical deduction. The first syllogism then suggests that the logical idea is sublated into nature and that nature is then sublated into *Geist* so that nature mediates logical idea and *Geist*:

Philosophy shows that ...

1. Logical idea is nature
2. Nature is Geist

C. Idea is Geist.

This syllogism concludes that *Geist* is the idea's most concrete and thus true form: *Geist* contains the logical idea and nature in the sense of having sublated them: the logical idea is *Geist* in abstract form and nature is *Geist* as if it were not *Geist*. This syllogism also implies that *Geist* is the only form of the idea in which the idea refers to itself: it is the idea that has returned to itself from its natural otherness so that *Geist* is the idea in active, or 'subjective' (EPM, §576), self-reflecting form. As such, it contains philosophy as the idea's self-comprehension in and through *Geist*'s finite thinkers (EPM, §575). The idea is *Geist*, and philosophy is *Geist* that comprehends that it and nature and the idea are *Geist*. *Geist* is thus all there is and philosophy is *Geist*'s activity of self-comprehension (EPM, §576). With regards to the three parts of the system, this means that the *Logic* describes *Geist*'s self-comprehension of its own abstract form and the philosophy of nature is *Geist*'s comprehension of its otherness.

However, this creates a problem: if the logical idea is *Geist* and nature is *Geist* and *Geist* is *Geist*, what, then, is *Geist*? In other words, if *Geist* is all there is, how can *Geist* be determined in contrast to anything else? Since *Geist* has absorbed the logical idea and nature, there is nothing to contrast *Geist* with on *Geist*'s own ontological plane: *Geist* is not defined in contrast to the logical idea or to nature, anymore. In lack of differentiation with anything else, *Geist* thus seems undetermined and unmediated: if everything can be explained with reference to *Geist*, *Geist* can be explained with reference to nothing. There is no principle from which *Geist* can be deduced or that can be applied to explain it. *Geist* thus seems merely immediate and as such, it is simply assumed.

To Hegel, this entails the need for a new understanding of philosophy and thus a new syllogism. This second syllogism should honour the first syllogism's lesson about *Geist*'s status as an active idea – and thus as a subject of philosophy – but it should also enable *Geist* to be defined in contrast to the idea's other determinations.

The second syllogism of philosophy

This motivates the second syllogism of philosophy. It states that *Geist* is the idea in active form that comprehends the logical idea and the idea as nature. As an expression of *Geist*, the finite philosopher thus employs philosophical thought to comprehend the logical idea and the idea as nature. As opposed to the first syllogism, this renders *Geist*'s determination as a concrete, subjective idea explicable, as *Geist* is now contrasted with nature's objective passivity and to the logical idea's abstractness. The syllogism thus states that the idea as logic and the idea as nature are forms of the idea to which philosophizing *Geist* relates on the same logical plane: philosophy means that *Geist* finds itself in idea and in nature:

1. *Geist* comprehends the idea as nature
2. *Geist* comprehends the logical idea

C. *Geist* comprehends itself, the logical idea and nature.

Geist thus discovers itself in logic and nature: the idea as *Geist* comprehends that logic and nature are compatible with itself. In so doing, *Geist* frees nature from its otherness: nature *is Geist*, just in objective form. A quote attributed to Hegel supports this reading: 'It is the philosophy of nature ... that sublates the separation of nature and Geist and allows Geist to comprehend its own [reasonable] essence in nature.'³⁵

The second syllogism thus implies that the structural unity of *Geist* and nature and *Geist* and logic as forms of the idea is something 'discovered' or 'cognized': the difference between logical idea and nature, on the one hand, and *Geist*, on the other, is prioritized and only overcome in the second step of *Geist*'s comprehension-based identification with logical idea and nature. First, *Geist* differs from logical idea and nature and then *Geist* discovers via philosophical cognition that it is identical with them. Unlike the first syllogism, the second syllogism explains what *Geist* is: it is not the logical idea *and* it is not nature. Instead, it is that form of the idea, which discovers itself in its forms as logical idea and nature. Since logical idea and nature are contrasted with *Geist* on the same plane, *Geist* is determined and intelligible as subjective and thus an active form of the idea. The first syllogism's problem of *Geist*'s all-encompassing immediacy and thus lack of contrast is accordingly avoided.

However, Hegel argues that this second syllogism creates another puzzle that it cannot solve itself: why is *Geist* able to comprehend logical idea and nature and thus find some kind of identity with itself in them? If *Geist* is assumed to differ from them *and then* discovers its identity with them via philosophical cognition, why is *Geist* able to do so in the first place? Why are logical idea and nature accessible to *Geist*?

The third syllogism

Hegel thus argues that the second syllogism leads to the realization that *Geist* is only able to comprehend the logical idea and nature *because it is always already identified*

with them. Logical idea, *Geist* and nature must always already be united so that *Geist*'s philosophical cognition can take place at all (EPM, §577).

This enables the third and final syllogism of philosophy. It states that since the logical idea, *Geist* and nature are all forms of the idea, they are philosophically intelligible to *Geist*. Philosophical intelligibility as well as the status of being *geistig* and thus being able to actively comprehend depends on the idea: *Geist* and nature and their relationships only exist because the idea exists. Since *Geist* and logical idea and nature are all idea, *Geist* can comprehend all forms of the idea. The third and final syllogism thus establishes that all subjects and objects of philosophical knowledge are idea and are known to be so:

1. The idea ('reason') knows its own objective form as nature (nature is the idea and is known to be)
 2. The idea knows its own subjective form as *Geist* (*Geist* is idea)
-

C. The idea knows itself in all its own forms.

According to the third syllogism, philosophy thus means that the idea as reason knows itself in nature and *Geist*. Since *Geist* is the idea's active form, the idea as *Geist* philosophically comprehends itself, nature and *Geist*. The idea's unconditioned truth as 'self-knowing reason' (EPM, §577) knows itself in natural and *geistige* form.

The reason *why* *Geist* can comprehend the logical idea and nature is thus intelligible from the very beginning: philosophical knowledge is possible because all that knows and all that is known is ultimately the idea. 'Philosophy' thus means that the idea as philosophical reason knows itself in its forms as *Geist* and nature. Nature and *Geist* are known to be equal forms of the idea and they mediate each other: *Geist* is 'not nature'. At the same time, nature is 'not-*Geist*'. Each moment defines its opposite by means of negation-based determination. Yet, despite their difference, *Geist* and nature are still unified in virtue of being idea and are known to be so. The idea knows that *Geist* is idea in active form while nature is idea in objective form. Meanwhile, the idea's own structure is also the structure of its self-knowing: like concept and objectivity unite to form the procedural idea, so *Geist* and nature form the idea's self-knowing as philosophy.

This enables a retrospective evaluation of the first two syllogisms of philosophy: while the first syllogism united all dimensions of the idea in the notion of *Geist* and established *Geist* as subject of philosophy, it also undermined the moments' difference and thus the mediation of *Geist*. To improve on this, the second syllogism differentiated the moments and thus enabled the determination of *Geist* to be determined in contrast to logical idea and nature. It then united the moments through the notion of *Geist*'s philosophical cognition but thereby undermined the moments' unity. The third syllogism unites all the positive lessons of its predecessors: it defines *Geist* as active idea, enables the determination of *Geist* in contrast to nature and logical idea, and explains why *Geist* can philosophically comprehend the idea, nature and itself. Against the first syllogism's suggestion that all is *Geist*, the third syllogism implies that *Geist* is not absolute: logic and nature are not immediately sublated in *Geist*. Instead, *Geist* and

nature are known to be moments of the idea that knows itself in its different forms. They are because the idea is. The idea thus structures thought, nature and *Geist* and as philosophizing *Geist*, it knows that it is doing so.

All moments are united in the notion of the idea as self-knowing reason: since they are determined forms of the idea, nature and *Geist* are differentiated and they mutually mediate. At the same time, *Geist* and nature are united through their status of being idea. Their being 'idea' thus provides the overarching unity that accommodates the moments' differentiation so that every conceptual moment is identified and within this identity, each is differentiated. The idea as subject of knowledge knows its own subjectivity as *Geist* and comprehends its own objectivity as nature. Neither moment is privileged, both are individualized, irreducible and united.

To Hegel, this notion of philosophy preserves Fichte's insight into the autonomy of individual, *geistige* thinkers: since *Geist* is the idea that is subjective, so are the particular philosophers who instantiate *Geist*. At the same time, philosophical truth is objective since the idea contains the concept's subjectivity and objectivity in balance.

Philosophy is *Geist* beyond *Geist*

This has interesting consequences for the relationship between *Geist* and idea. On the one hand, Hegel defines philosophy as the knowledge that the idea has about itself in its forms as nature and *Geist*: philosophy means that the idea as reason knows itself in its forms as logical idea, nature and *Geist* through *Geist*, that is in and through the thinking activity of *geistige* individuals. At the same time, Hegel seems to define philosophy as part of *Geist* when he places his discussion of philosophy within the context of his philosophy of *Geist*: philosophy is self-knowing idea/reason *and* absolute *Geist*: 'The third syllogism is the Idea of philosophy, which has self-knowing reason, the absolutely universal, for its middle, a middle that divides into [*Geist*] and nature, making mind the presupposition, as the process of the Idea's subjective activity, and nature the universal extreme, as the process of the Idea that is in itself, objective' (EPM, §577).

This implies that if philosophy were but absolute *Geist* instead of self-knowing reason and thus (logical) idea, the following contradiction would arise: if both logic and nature are *Geist* – which explains why they can be thought by *Geist* – and if this was the same *Geist* of which philosophy is a part, then *Geist* could not comprehend itself as a moment of truth and thereby vindicate itself philosophically.

Since to Hegel, to 'comprehend' something means to define it as different to its negation within an overarching conceptual unity, *Geist* can only be comprehended as *Geist* when it is contrasted with its own negation within a unity. This entails that philosophy as part of *Geist* must have gone beyond *Geist* and thus beyond itself as being merely a part of *Geist*. Philosophy thus points beyond *Geist* whilst being a part of it: philosophy is something done by *Geist* but reveals *Geist* to be the idea in active – that is, subjective – form.

Philosophizing *Geist* thus becomes aware of its own status as form of the idea through the activity of philosophy. In a sense, philosophy is thus always already emancipated from *Geist* because *Geist* points beyond itself to the idea by means of philosophy. Philosophy therefore not only speaks from the perspective of *Geist* but

also from the perspective of *Geist* that comprehends that *Geist* is but a form of the idea. It comprehends nature and *Geist* and philosophy itself as aspects of the idea: the idea in the form of *Geist* uses philosophy to comprehend itself and its forms. This self-comprehension implies that *Geist* is not absolute but that the idea is: *Geist* is the idea in subjective form that comprehends itself. This act of self-comprehension is only possible because the idea freely gave itself the form of *Geist*.

The self-knowing philosophical reason of the third syllogism of philosophy is thus the idea that knows by means of its form as *Geist* that it is always already with itself in nature and in *Geist*. Philosophy as part of *Geist* enables this knowledge because it takes the idea's active form to engage in this self-comprehending activity.

This makes philosophy and *Geist* expressions of the idea in its form of 'reason' while this 'reason' has always already manifested and comprehended itself. Philosophy is thus a *geistige* comprehension that points beyond itself to its grounding in the idea: reason knows that it is *Geist* and that *Geist* has reason and thus the idea as its grounding. Reason is thus *Geist* that comprehends that it itself is not the most fundamental ontological principle but that this is the idea.

Rather than 'cognition', where a subject understands something else, philosophy is unity-based *knowing* where a subject realizes that it relates to itself in the act of comprehension: the idea as philosophical reason knows that it is the subject and the object of philosophical knowledge. The going-beyond-itself of *Geist* in philosophy can thus be described as a return-to-itself by the idea as reason: while *Geist* discovers its real status as a moment of idea-based reason, reason comprehends that it grounds nature and *Geist*.

This also provides a clue as to why Hegel calls the first two syllogisms the 'appearance' (EPM, §577) of the third: the first two syllogisms fail to explicate that, ultimately, nature and *Geist* are idea and are integrated into the idea's self-knowing. By arguing that *Geist*'s thinking activity is all there is to philosophy, the first syllogism undermines the notion of an ideal unity of *Geist*, nature and logical idea: logical idea and nature are thinkable by *Geist* because they are *Geist*, and yet, they inexplicably differ from *Geist* (EPM, §577). Meanwhile, the second syllogism suggests that idea and nature are different entities philosophically cognized by *Geist*. By focusing on the distinctness of idea, nature and *Geist*, the second syllogism thus reports on how the idea *appears* in different forms rather than that these are fundamentally united through the idea.

Hegel's notion of philosophy thus defends the irreducibility of nature and *Geist* and renders them intelligible as forms of the idea while taking the perspective of reason as unity of *Geist* and nature. This implies that real-objective nature and ideal-subjective *Geist* are the always already subjectivity- and objectivity-uniting idea and that the idea and thus the individual philosophical thinker knows itself as what it is in them.

Idealism as a philosophy of philosophy and Fichte

This also enables an answer to the question: in what sense is Hegel's idealism 'absolute' and thus self-referential? Within the *geistige* philosopher, the idea refers to and comprehends itself.

This makes philosophy the idea's, and thus the truth's, self-comprehension. Philosophy is thus first and foremost unconditioned truth's self-reference.

Hegel vs Fichte?

This underlines a fundamental difference between Hegel and Fichte: while Hegel's idealism and his notion of philosophy are ultimately defined by self-reference in virtue of the idea's overarching unity, Fichte's notion of philosophy retains an irreducible, non-accommodated moment of 'referring-to-other.' Fichte's I and Non-I, his individual thinker and the universal, philosophical truth are first differentiated and then *ought to be* united but remain different from each other. When seeking philosophical truth, Fichte's individual thinkers *ought to* comprehend something that differs from them. In contrast, Hegel's philosophers *do* comprehend truth because they are part of truth's self-comprehension. It thus seems that Fichte prioritizes the difference between individual self-conscious thinkers and universal truth. His subsequent claims about their unity create a notion of their possible but not of their actual unity: Fichte's philosophers *can* know the truth but they do not.

Still, Hegel agrees with Fichte that the finite philosopher differs from truth in virtue of the former's particularity and the latter's universality. Yet, going beyond Fichte, Hegel also seeks to situate this difference within an overarching conceptual unity without losing the difference between particular thinker and universal truth. To Fichte, thinker and truth differ and seek to become one. To Hegel, thinker and truth differ *because* they are one. Philosophy is thus truth's and thereby universal reason's self-reference *within* the individual thinker while the thinker is part of this self-reference by the truth: the idea as *Geist* comprehends *itself* in logic and nature in and through the individual thinker. The truth is self-referential and thus absolute, and the thinker is an active aspect of this self-reference.

From the perspective of Hegel's empirically given thinker, this means: philosophical knowledge can be actual because it always already exists as potential within the thinker and it is actual because the thinker freely decides to activate its potential. By making the free choice to think philosophically, the individual renders truth's self-reference actual. Truth's philosophical self-comprehension is thus always possible but it is only actual when the empirical individual decides to think. At the same time, the individual's decision to think the truth is coextensive with the truth's self-reference: the individual thinker's choice to think the truth and the truth's self-reference are the same. So a given empirical thinker might get the thinking of philosophical truth wrong, the successful philosopher's thought is identical with the truth's self-reference.

In contrast, Fichte would argue that the individual's choice to think must not be equated with universal truth's self-thinking as this undermines the thinker's freedom. To Fichte, truth and thinker must be fundamentally differentiated to avoid the thinker's dogmatic absorption into the overarching's truth's self-reference, even if this means that the philosophical thinker can err.

A second sense of absoluteness

Given the at least empirical plausibility of Fichte's view, this raises the question about Hegel's reasons for excluding the possibility of error from the definition of philosophy. He does so by including another kind of absoluteness and thus self-referentiality within

his notion of philosophy. It relates to his claim that philosophy must contain a notion of what philosophy itself is: philosophy must contain a philosophy of philosophy:

- (1) To philosophize means to conceptually prove absolute truth
- (2) Claim '(1)' must itself be proven to be part of absolute truth

(C) Philosophy must prove itself.

In other words, if philosophy did not prove itself to be expression of absolute truth, one would not philosophically know that philosophy is a description of absolute truth. This would leave room for error and doubt: it could be that philosophy is not the self-knowing of reason and thus the self-comprehension of truth. Philosophy might thus be not truth's self-knowing so it could be non-truth, that is, falsehood. If subject and object of philosophy are not the same absolute truth, philosophy itself might be wrong. However, this must be impossible if philosophy is to make good on its inherent claim to being a description of truth. Only if both subject and object of philosophy are shown to be absolute truth, then truth and actual knowledge are proven and are proven to be philosophy (EPM, §577).

Hegel thinks that it is this status of being 'true thinking of the truth' that philosophy has to prove to guarantee its own status as true knowledge. So only when philosophy is explicitly proven to be self-knowing truth, the possibility of its failure and wrongness is disproven and philosophy itself is justified, which includes its own notion of philosophy. In this case, there is a conceptual proof that philosophy's conceptual proving and thus also its proving of what philosophy is, guarantees truth. Philosophy must therefore comprehend and prove itself to be self-knowing truth to justify its own status as truth – it must contain a philosophy of philosophy. This entails that to Hegel, all philosophical claims, including the deduction of philosophy, are justified in virtue of being part of self-knowing truth's self-description.

Taking the perspective of self-transparent truth, Hegel's philosopher thus knows that doing philosophy means to articulate truth's self-description. The thinker is aware that philosophy is truth's self-articulation in conceptual form and that the thinker thinks truth when thinking philosophically. In contrast, if one thinks philosophically without self-consciously knowing what one is doing when one philosophizes, one's thinking is conceptually incomplete or self-unaware. The truths articulated in the course of this thinking need not be wrong, but they are conceptually intransparent as to what they are.

This also entails that comprehending that philosophy is truth's self-knowing means that there is no higher-order justification of philosophy. A further reason would be redundant because philosophy is already the self-justification of the highest possible criterion for truth: true reason. Every other attempt at justifying truth could only affirm what is already proven: that philosophy is and must be truth's self-thinking.

For the finite thinker, this entails that philosophy is equal to participation in the truth's self-knowing – and this participation takes place in a manner that is self-conscious about the fact that this is what philosophy is. The individual philosopher

thus comprehends universal truth and comprehends that this amounts to universal truth's self-comprehension in the thinker and takes place in virtue of the thinker's free decision: instead of being a passive vessel for universal truth, the thinker actively enables truth's self-comprehension by deciding to think truth: '[Philosophy] is ... unified into the simple spiritual intuition and then elevated in it to self-conscious thinking' (EPM, §572).

To Hegel, philosophy is thus not love of or striving or a longing for truth, it is thinking the truth and knowing that one is doing so. While Fichte categorically insists on the irreducible possibility of error in all thought, including philosophical thinking, Hegel rejects this possibility from a conceptual, not from the empirical, point of view. Whether Hegel is right in accusing Fichte of undermining his own philosophical claims and his definition of philosophy by categorically incorporating the possibility of error into philosophical thought or whether Fichte is right in avoiding the identification of thinker and truth to avoid a return to pre-Kantian dogmatism cannot be discussed here. It might suffice to say that at least Hegel thinks he is providing an account of philosophy that empirically, if not conceptually, allows for fallibility – and thus protects particularity by grounding his argument on the structure of the concept.

Conclusion

When Fichte defines the notion of philosophy, he shows concern with protecting the difference between philosophical thinker and unconditioned, philosophical truth to save the particular thinker's individuality and thus his freedom against the all-encompassing 'dogmatism' of an exclusively objective or subjective truth's self-reference. On Hegel's reading, this amounts to denying the unity of thinker and truth *in principle*, which undermines the actuality of philosophy as the individual thinkers' participation in truth's self-reference. According to Hegel, Fichte's eternally striving philosophers seek truth but never have it, which undermines Fichte's own philosophical claims about what philosophy is.

In response to Hegel's criticism, Fichte could argue that Hegel's notion of philosophy as truth's self-reference undermines the individual philosopher's individuality and freedom: at best, Hegel's individual thinker is a passive vessel or tool for truth's self-articulation. Whether Hegel is correct in defending himself against such a charge by arguing that his account of the philosophy-grounding 'concept' is able to balance truth's universality with the philosophers' particularity without undermining either while his differentiation between a conceptual and empirical perspective still allows for empirical error on the part of the particular philosophers, remains a matter in need of further investigation.³⁶

Notes

- 1 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Inwood's translation. Cf. also VGP I, 24.

- 2 Cf. Ware (2019: 240).
- 3 Used to define its unique causality so that it grounds, causes, defines, etc.
- 4 Regarding the irreducibility of objectivity in the broadest sense (as Non-I, Anstoss and Aufforderung), see Gottlieb (2019).
- 5 In the 1804 lectures, Fichte insinuates that his own philosophy is best understood as a unity of ultimately irrational realism and factual idealism (Fichte 2005: 92). While he searches for a final and fixed form of such a unity in the course of all his presentations of the Science of Knowing, it seems safe to say that his negative account of an ultimately unknowable god comes closest to representing such a unity. Cf. also Gabriel (2019).
- 6 Cf. Zöller (2010).
- 7 Cf. Rockmore (2010: 17).
- 8 Non-transcendent.
- 9 'Die intellektuelle Anschauung von welcher die Wissenschaftslehre redet, geht gar nicht auf ein Sein sondern auf ein Handeln' (Fichte 1971e: 472).
- 10 Cf. 'Die Wissenschaft, geht über die Einsicht, dass schlechthin alles Mannigfaltige in dem Einen gegründet und auf dasselbe zurückzuführen sey ... hinaus zu der Einsicht des Wie dieses Zusammenhanges: und für sie wird genetisch, was für die Religion nur ein absolutes Factum ist ... [D]ie Wissenschaft hebt allen Glauben auf und verwandelt ihn in Schauen' (Fichte 1971a: 471).
- 11 Cf. Fichte (1994: 25).
- 12 'Diese ... Einsicht ist nun die absolute Vernunft Einsicht = absolute Vernunft selber; wir sind in dieser Einsicht die absolute Vernunft unmittelbar geworden, und in ihr aufgegangen' (Fichte 1986: 268).
- 13 Cf. Fichte (2005: 29).
- 14 Cf. Fichte (1986: 268) and Fichte (1997: 203).
- 15 Cf. Verwey (2016: 287).
- 16 Cf. Fichte (1997: 197ff) and Fichte (1994: 20ff). Cf. 'Der Grund der Selbstständigkeit und Freiheit des Bewusstseyns liegt freilich in Gott; aber ebendarum und deswegen, weil er in Gott liegt, ist die Selbstständigkeit und Freiheit wahrhaftig da, und keinesweges ein leerer Schein.'
- 17 'Wissen vom Wissen' (Fichte 1971b: 7).
- 18 Still, if the thinker and the sought philosophical truth were just different, knowledge about the universal I – in the sense of an identity between universal I and individual I – would be impossible (cf. Fichte 1971b: 38).
- 19 Cf. Rockmore (2015: 92).
- 20 Cf. Fichte (1971a: 443) about *Vernunftglauben*: '[Und] insbesondere trägt das hier betrachtete Denken, an seinem Beruhen auf sich selber, und seinem sich selber Bewähren ... den Charakter der Absolutheit; und erprobt sich dadurch als reines, eigentliches und absolutes Denken. Und so ist denn ... erwiesen, dass nur im reinen Denken unsere Vereinigung mit Gott erkannt werden könne.'
- 21 Cf. Fichte (1971a: 417): 'Zweitens weiss und erkenne ich ... folgendes: dass man nur durch das eigentliche, reine und wahre Denken, und schlechthin durch kein anderes Organ, die Gottheit und das aus ihr fließende selige Leben ergreifen und an sich bringen könne.'
- 22 Cf. Fichte (1971a: 417–418) about *Vernunftglaubens*: 'das man, in seiner eigenen Person, und nicht in einer fremden, mit seinem eigenen geistigen Auge, und nicht durch ein fremdes, Gott unmittelbar anschau, habe und besitze. Dies aber ist nur durch das reine und selbstständige Denken möglich; denn nur durch dieses wird

- man eine eigene Person; und dieses allein ist das Auge, dem Gott sichtbar werden kann. Das reine Denken ist selbst das göttliche Daseyn; und umgekehrt, das göttliche Daseyn in seiner Unmittelbarkeit ist nichts anderes, denn das reine Denken.'
- 23 Cf. Fichte (1971c: 172) and Fichte (1971a: 22).
- 24 'Es ist, ausser Gott, gar nichts wahrhaftig [...] da, denn – das Wissen: und dieses Wissen ist das göttliche Daseyn selber, schlechthin und unmittelbar, und inwiefern wir das Wissen sind, sind wir selber in unserer tiefsten Wurzel das göttliche Daseyn. Alles andere, was noch als Daseyn uns erscheint, – die Dinge, die Körper, die Seelen, wir selber, inwiefern wir uns ein selbstständiges und unabhängiges Seyn zuschreiben, – ist gar nicht wahrhaftig und an sich da; sondern es ist nur da im Bewusstseyn und Denken, als Bewusstes und Gedachtes' (Fichte 1971a: 447).
- 25 To Fichte, philosophical cognition and theoretical cognition might thus ultimately have the same fundamental structure. Regarding Fichte's concept of striving in cognition and praxis, see Kinlaw (2019).
- 26 Cf. against this: 'So jemand ... nicht zur Einsicht [Gottes und seiner Erscheinung] kommt, so kommt derselbe auch nicht zum Denken und zur wahren inneren Selbstständigkeit des Geistes, sondern er bleibt anheimgegeben dem Meinen, und ist alle die Tage seines Lebens hindurch gar kein eigener Verstand, sondern nur ein Anhang zu fremdem Verstande; es mangelt ihm immerfort ein geistiges Sinnorgan, und zwar das edelste, welches der Geist hat' (Fichte 1971a: 416).
- 27 Cf. Fichte (1997: 178).
- 28 Cf. Wood (2016: 172).
- 29 See also Thomas-Fogiel (2019: 120–124).
- 30 Cf. Fichte (1994: 176).
- 31 The *Philosophy of Mind* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (2007).
- 32 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Geraets, Suchting and Harris' translation.
- 33 Quotes from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Mind* are from Knox's translation.
- 34 Insofar as Hegel places Fichte's account of consciousness and his entire philosophical project in the realm of the idea as *Geist*, Hegel's philosophical project is broader and investigates the logical idea and the idea as nature as conceptually necessary complements of *Geist*.
- 35 Translation by author. Original: 'Die Naturphilosophie [...] ist es, welche die Trennung der Natur und des Geistes aufhebt und dem Geiste die Erkenntnis seines [vernünftigen] Wesens in der Natur gewährt' (EPN §246 A).
- 36 Some thoughts on this can be found in Stein (2017).

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Metaphilosophical Pluralism: Idealist Variations on *Alleinphilosophie*

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Introduction

In his 1862 inaugural address to the University of Heidelberg, Eduard Zeller referred to an earlier age in which ‘fantastic systems ... replaced each other one by one’ (Zeller 1877: 483). Those were the days, by then a few decades *vorbei*, when a serious philosopher was expected to produce a system of philosophy. The trope is so familiar to us scholars of German Idealism that we need to zoom out to see it in perspective. Zeller’s vantage point is an appropriate guide, since he proposed in his lecture that philosophers work collaboratively and with deference to the empirical sciences. The earlier philosophers, by contrast, each sought to articulate the whole of philosophy. They related their collective story as a progressive sequence of systems, and we might condense that story: In response to Kant, Karl Reinhold recognized the need to unify philosophical knowledge into a single principle. He proposed such a principle, before Fichte declared that Reinhold had gotten it wrong. Schelling then declared that Fichte had gotten it wrong, before Hegel – in a triumph concluding in absolute knowledge – explained how Schelling had gotten it wrong.

The narrative that I here abstract was first formulated by Hegel himself, codified by his followers who authored histories of philosophy, and resurrected a century later (after a long neo-Kantian interlude) by German neo-Hegelians who wished to define classical German philosophy as a chronological progression ‘*von Kant bis Hegel*’, to borrow the title of Richard Kroner’s (1921) classic. Of course, the story had as many variations as there were systems, and this fact has lent modern scholars an array of ready-made tropes according to which to modify, gently and modestly, the Hegelian narrative. Did the later Schelling get his revenge on Hegel? What about the later Fichte?

The gist of all this, however, is that two full generations of philosophers participated in a competition amongst systems named for their authors, which we today can only regard as a singular and peculiar historical phenomenon. What we call the metaphilosophy of this group – their philosophy of philosophy – begins with these facts about how they practised their craft. The idealists approached philosophy as something at once individual and universal. Each philosopher presents his own system, but each

claims universality for it and it alone. We scholars of German Idealism know better – for reasons that should likewise appear curious to us – how to zoom in on this picture than we know how to zoom out from it. The present chapter is an attempt to examine these developments with a wide-angle lens, and so more as Zeller viewed them than as Hegel or Schelling did. I present a selection of arguments by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel as efforts to come to terms with the *de facto* plurality of philosophies while each insisted on the unity and completeness of philosophy.

The relevant methodological problems occupied Hegel as early as his 1801 *Differenzschrift*. He began that essay by negating Zeller's central premise: the systems in question were not, *qua* philosophies, the products of particular persons (*qua* particular persons). 'Whatever is thus peculiar in a philosophy,' wrote the 31-year-old Hegel, 'must *ipso facto* belong to the form of the system and not to the essence of the philosophy' (DIFE, W2, 17). This is one way to make the inconsistent seem consistent, to reconcile the proprietary metaphilosophy (i.e. the claim that there are semantic entities called philosophies that are the property of their authors) with its universalist goals. The conflicts amongst the philosophies would disappear, Hegel thought, if we eliminate the personalities of the philosophers. But this approach removes the inconsistency only by placing it inside the head of each philosopher. How does a particular human express a universal philosophy? Hegel would eventually answer this question – his *Phenomenology* purported to show the individual the standpoint of science within himself (PhG, SW, 26–33) – but in the *Differenzschrift* he rather retracted the point as it applies to actual philosophers. The shortcomings of Fichte's and Reinhold's philosophies, he claimed, derive from the presence of idiosyncrasies from the authors.¹

To Zeller and his colleagues, on the other hand, this whole set of practices, the *modus operandi philosophi* of their predecessors, was an 'embarrassment'. Was not the achievement of knowledge, they wondered, a collaborative affair? Was not all the knowledge recently accumulated due to specific investigations? Has not the modern university – that putative organ of knowledge on the earth – divided into distinct faculties and research specialties? In these questions we should be compelled to side with Zeller and Kuno Fischer against Hegel and Schelling. Philosophy is not, for us, a matter of unifying the whole of human knowledge. But many of us nonetheless find something attractive in the universalizing impulse. In any sufficiently well-defined dispute, many will agree, only one side can be in the right. These philosophers took, as perhaps we cannot, philosophy to be precisely one well-defined dispute.

In the next section, I label the Fichtean doctrine of *Alleinphilosophie*, the view that only one philosophy can be right, general metaphilosophical exclusivism. This view was defended by Fichte – with that characteristic vigour that Hegel lamented as too personal – in the introductions to his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Schelling also defended it, less successfully I will argue, in his writings of 1794 and 1795. But Schelling soon retreated into what I call in the following section ethical inclusivism, the view that philosophy may be equally well practised by apparently divergent schools of thought. This allowed Schelling better to appreciate the diverse impulses amongst philosophers of the past while remaining devoted to truth and unity in philosophy. It was these arguments, I claim in the next section, to which Hegel was responding when he developed the doctrines I examine in the final sections: his doctrine of refutation, his

view of propositional truth and his outline for a history of philosophy. Hegel took seriously the prospect of metaphilosophical pluralism. In my conclusion I argue that we can complete these thoughts from Hegel only by taking his philosophy as just one more expression from the past, which requires friends of Hegel to examine his writings only with a cautious and critical distance.

Fichte and the challenge of general exclusivism

Fichte's positions on philosophical disagreement receive straightforward formulation in the introductions to his *Wissenschaftslehre*, written in 1797. The task and nature of philosophy being given, he reasons, there is only one genuine solution to the problem that it raises. This is the doctrine of *Alleinphilosophie*, the thesis that there is only one true philosophy. In this chapter I refer rather to metaphilosophical exclusivism, since the term contrasts usefully with inclusivism and pluralism. But what is a philosophy? Fichte is characteristically clear on this point:

But what is the basis of the system of those representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity, and what is the basis of this feeling of necessity itself? This is a question well worth pondering. *It is the task of philosophy to answer this question; indeed, to my mind, nothing is philosophy except that science which discharges this task.* Another name for the system of representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity is 'experience' – whether inner or outer. We could thus express the task of philosophy in different words as follows: *Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience.*

(Fichte 1994: 8; my emphasis)

Experience presents us, Fichte continues, with two matters from which we may abstract: the intellect and the thing (we might prefer to say 'mind and world'). One needs to be explained in terms of the other. Either we explain the mind in terms of the world, then, or we explain the world in terms of the mind. The former option Fichte calls variously dogmatism or materialism;² the latter option is idealism. Contrary to what history might suggest, then, there are only two possible philosophies. This argument presents the null hypothesis of German Idealist metaphilosophy, which any other thesis or argument will have to disprove. It is also the end of Fichte's (early) metaphilosophical doctrine proper, although it receives some elaboration in the author's claim to have discovered the right answer to his question.

The remainder of the 'First Introduction' executes the middle premise of a simple disjunctive syllogism: either materialism or idealism; not materialism; therefore idealism. For our purposes there is no need to analyse Fichte's theoretical arguments to this point. What is more important for us, and what we find Schelling struggling with in these same years, is the ethical variation of the argument. The choice between apparent systems, Fichte claims, is a free one. He then writes what has been his most famous line: 'The kind of philosophy one chooses depends upon the kind of person one is' (Fichte 1994: 20). A free person chooses the system most compatible with

freedom (idealism), whereas a slavish person chooses the option more compatible with his mentality (materialist determinism). Of the two possible philosophies, he continues, only one of them is morally practicable. Fichte was so convinced of this point that he accused Spinoza, modern philosophy's arch-determinist, of not believing his own philosophy.³

I wish to defend the initial plausibility of this argument by making some distinctions and abstracting from some historical peculiarities. The first problem is that Fichte begins with a definition of philosophy that few today would take for more than a relic of Prussian thought of the 1790s. Fichte's definition, however, translates into something harmless such as 'to give a general account of the world', where the concept 'world' receives a suitably Kantian, experiential gloss. So metaphilosophical exclusivism, or *Alleinphilosophie*, is the simplest position: it says that philosophies are theories that present a general account of the world, and only one of them is true.

The second point to consider is that the one true system of philosophy, which Fichte called the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is not to be confused with any particular sequence of sentences. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is not a book, not any mere sequence of sentences. Although there is only one true philosophy, then, that philosophy admits of indefinitely many formulations. To this extent we should label Fichte's position 'general metaphilosophical reference exclusivism' as opposed to sense exclusivism – the latter would be the more fundamentalist position that a specific text or set of meanings could exclusively express the correct general account of the world. In these terms we should say that Fichte combined sense pluralism with his reference exclusivism, and as a consequence he rewrote his philosophy anew each academic year in which he lectured on it.⁴

The third position to consider is that while exclusivism is in important respects ahistorical, the exclusivist thesis does not rule out all approaches to the history of philosophy. The *Aetas kantiana* is rather the central episode in philosophical historiography – the people who wrote our canonical histories were Kantians and Hegelians⁵ – precisely because of the exclusivism of its main protagonists. The fact that these people took themselves to have discovered, or at least approximated, the true philosophy is what raised for them the question of philosophy's history. Kantians wielded a narrative of how misconceived controversies led from Thales, through the various scholasticisms, to the master himself. This is the narrative that we know best, and it has lent us our chief historiographical categories. Hegelians, by contrast, wondered how Spirit came to know itself completely only in the Prussian Republic. Famously, they also had answers to this curious question.

The fourth and final point is that Fichte's conclusions in this argument do not preclude the possibility that philosophy is a collaborative effort. It is thus necessary to distinguish, as Hegel did, the entailments of Fichte's arguments from some of the personal peculiarities of its author. Fichte was notoriously didactic and defensive as a polemicist. He even professed – in the title of one of his books no less – to wish to force his readership to understand him.⁶ We might ask why he did not rather humbly submit his ideas to its scrutiny, and his defensive posture belied his belief that only one person had discovered the truth. This peculiarity of Johann Gottlieb, however, is only contingently tied to the exclusivist thesis: from the fact that there is only one

philosophy, and one true answer to its foundational question, it does not follow that only one person knows that answer. I mention this because Fichte's successors struggled with precisely this aspect of his philosophy, though I conclude that they did not struggle with it as much as they should have.

Schelling's ethical inclusivism

My portrayal of Fichte as the arch-exclusivist is incomplete in that it represents only a stage in his metaphilosophical thinking. By 1804 he had retreated to a more moderate position, which can be discovered in his *Wissenschaftslehre* and other texts of that year.⁷ By that point his philosophy had benefited from the criticism of his early disciples, and I turn now to one set of such criticisms. Fichte's most famous disciple was Schelling, who defended his mentor's exclusivism during the mid-1790s. As Schelling tells it, he was led by Kant to consider the need for 'an original form' of all philosophy, and he found this problem to have been inadequately characterized in Reinhold's elemental philosophy.

This story appears in the opening of a short essay called 'On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy', which Schelling wrote in 1794 shortly after reading 'the newest work of Professor Fichte' (Schelling 1980: 39). Reinhold, Schelling claimed, had isolated the content of philosophy, namely consciousness, but he had not elaborated this content in an appropriate form. He saw, in other words, the need for the sides of Kant's philosophy to be reconciled by a single content, but he did not present the argument in a strictly unified system. By 'form' Schelling thus means the manner in which philosophy appears as a derivation of *Sätze* from *Grundsätze*, of theorems from axioms. Science, he claims, has a form appropriate to its (single, unified) content only when all theorems derive from a single axiom. This the system hypothesis, or the idea that knowledge or science requires a unified and complete presentation. From this hypothesis, Schelling believes (his argument is less complete than it might be), it follows that there can only be one system: 'This much is clear that, if the content of philosophy necessarily creates its form or the form its content, *then there can only be one philosophy in line with the very idea of philosophy*. Any other philosophy would be different than this single philosophy' (Schelling 1980: 40).

Since philosophy is systematic, Schelling claims, there can only be one system. He thus took the exclusivist thesis to follow immediately from the system hypothesis. A longer text from the following year, 'On the I as Principle of Philosophy' (1795), continues the argument along Fichtean lines. The concerns of this work are more epistemological, and he begins with a classic regress argument: if there is any knowledge, or any true propositions or *Sätze*, then there must be a first proposition or axiom (*Grundsatz*) (Schelling 1980: 72). By definition, the first axiom is unconditioned, or not known through another axiom. Only Fichte's absolute I, he declares (with something less than a complete argument), can play the desired role.

Schelling then gestures at the problem of pluralism without exactly stating the problem as such: if there is one object of philosophy, *and* one system that elaborates that object from a single principle, then we must reconcile this fact with our diverse,

individual, empirical selves. Schelling then determines the task of philosophy in terms of the apparent contradiction between the first principle (the absolute I) and ourselves:

The perfect system of science proceeds from the absolute I, *excluding everything that stands in contrast to it*. This, as the one *unconditionable*, conditions the whole chain of knowledge, circumscribes the sphere of all that is thinkable and, as absolute all-comprehending reality, rules the whole system of our knowledge. Only through the absolute I ... does it become possible that a not-I appears in contrast to it, indeed that philosophy itself becomes possible. *For the whole task of theoretical and practical philosophy is nothing else than the solution of the contradiction between the pure and the empirically conditioned I.*

(Schelling 1980: 81)

These arguments lack the clarity and formal validity that we find in Fichte's introductions of 1797, but they conclude in the same principles. They also suggest that the problem of pluralism is inherent to idealism: a philosophy that asserts a pure ego or *Ich* needs to reckon with the obvious fact of empirical selves or persons. I recount these arguments here, however, merely as a preface to the pluralistic strain that appears in Schelling's writings later in 1795, in his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. In *Letters* Schelling abandoned metaphilosophical exclusivism for broadly ethical reasons, just as Fichte had defended it on an ethical basis.⁸

Letters begins with the familiar Fichtean claim that there is a theoretical standstill between idealism and determinism. Whereas Fichte judged that determinism is not an ethically viable philosophy, however, Schelling turns the point into a more cautious hypothetical: 'In order to realize its claim, dogmatism [re: determinism] itself must appeal to a jurisdiction other than that of theoretical reason; it must seek another domain wherein to obtain a verdict ... *I believe I can retort best by presenting a consistent dogmatic ethics*' (Schelling 1980: 167).

Where Schelling breaks from Fichte is thus on the question of whether a determinist such as Spinoza may treat his philosophy as a guide to life. Spinoza's philosophy, according to both Fichte and Kant, was a merely academic exercise. But their *modus ponens* becomes Schelling's *modus tollens*:

Perchance you remember that I once asked *Why did Spinoza present his philosophy in a system of ethics?* Certainly he did not do it to no purpose. Of him it can be said properly, 'he lived in his system.' But surely, he also conceived of more than an airy fabric of theory in which a spirit like his could hardly have found the rest and the heaven in understanding in which he so obviously live and moved.

(Schelling 1980: 171)

Schelling turns the ethical argument against metaphilosophical exclusivism, rather than against the first-order theories of idealism or determinism. The strong exclusivist position, he claims, is one of intolerance: 'nothing can be more unbearable than the despotism of narrow minds who cannot tolerate another system beside their own' (Schelling 1980: 172). This argument extends into the *Seventh Letter*, in which we find

Schelling arguing that there is no performative contradiction in living as a determinist. He imagines the Critical Philosopher (a Kantian or Fichtean) asking 'how Spinoza could bear the contradiction of such demand'. He answers:

the commandment '*annihilate thyself!*' could not be fulfilled as long as he had to value the subject as highly as it is valued in the system of freedom. But this was his very aim; his self was not to be his property; it was to belong to infinite reality ... the subject as such cannot annihilate itself for, in order to do so, it would have to survive its own annihilation. But Spinoza did not acknowledge any subject as such. For his part, he had done away with the concept of a subject before he set up his own postulate.

(Schelling 1980: 178)

In the remainder of *Letters* Schelling practices his newfound ethical inclusivism by further examining competing schools of philosophical ethics.⁹ In the end, however, he characterizes 'the ultimate goal' of philosophy by postulating a kind of abstract agreement amongst the philosophers. He describes this first as a 'point of indifference' at which all philosophies meet. He otherwise calls this the absolute, the unconditioned, etc. These terms eventually became the bugaboo in idealist metaphysics, bringing to Schelling and Hegel the mockery of many critics. But the admittedly curious expressions were initially, and perhaps primarily, mere metaphilosophical terms. Schelling's simple point was that all the noble and good philosophies, of which we empirically find so many amongst previous thinkers, must have some ultimate point in common. The absolute, for Schelling, is at least sometimes a mere placeholder for this idea. His point was that there are many ways that philosophers have lived the truth, even if the truth (as scholastic dogma had it) is one.

The *Letters on Dogmatism* thus represents a key text in the history of metaphilosophical pluralism, since it combines the exclusivist aim to 'close the controversy among the philosophers' with a recognition of the methodological and doctrinal equipollence that is so bountifully evidenced in the history of philosophy. The first goal reflects the profound ambitions of philosophers: we hope to give arguments so complete and convincing as to make informed dissent impossible. The second concerns our humility and generosity: the sages gone before us cannot have had it all so wrong. Despite the reasonable motivations of this argument, however, it is fair to side with Hegel and later critics in asserting that Schelling did not give an adequate theoretical formulation of metaphilosophical pluralism. The idea that there is an absolute or point of indifference common to all genuine philosophies needed much more elaboration than Schelling was able to provide.

Hegel's theoretical inclusivism

Hegel was a keen observer of these developments. Although he tended to side with Schelling against Fichte, he was ultimately a critic of the latter's facile inclusivism. His 1801 *Differenzschrift* represents a struggle with the existence of multiple systems

of philosophy, perhaps as much in the Fichtean as in the Schellingian spirit of these debates. The appearance of distinct philosophies, he reasons, results from the presence of too many personal idiosyncrasies. Further, the appearance of idiosyncrasies in philosophy, for the youngish Hegel, results from a certain failure on the part of philosophers. One might compare Nietzsche's notorious quip that all philosophies are unconscious autobiographies (Nietzsche 1997: 5:19–20). For Hegel this was true only of the bad philosophies.

In Hegel's case we have to reconcile his impersonal approach to philosophy with his historicism, a task at which his appropriationist followers too often fall short. The most famous metaphilosophical assertions in his corpus are the concluding reflections to the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, which declare that philosophy is 'the thought of the world' merely reconstructed as history passes (PR, 22–23).¹⁰ Philosophy, then, is an essentially historical activity, and each philosophy will reflect something of the times in which it appears. But expanding on Schelling's indifference hypothesis, Hegel argued that all the philosophies in history (Stoicism and Epicureanism, Spinoza's system and Fichte's) were in essence one philosophy. How did he reconcile his historicist impulse, according to which philosophies belong essentially to their historical context, with the exclusivist thesis that there can only be one philosophy? In this section I wish to indicate just a few of the arguments that Hegel made on this score.

Refutation and the argument from finality

The first argument that I wish to examine from Hegel is his attempt to dismiss claims to finality in philosophy: if (the one true) philosophy is to include the positions of diverse philosophers, then (given the obvious doctrinal conflicts amongst the philosophers) the extant philosophies cannot offer the final word on the genuine issues that they raise. The starting point of this argument is a kind of formalization of Schelling's empathic historical method. Hegel proposes, in some passages deep within his *Science of Logic*, a theory of refutation that would require us to read other philosophers on their own terms. Here I point to only one consequence of this view, and I hope to highlight some of the confusions that arise when we translate that consequence onto the historical plane. Hegel's most common method of criticizing philosophers consists in highlighting their false claims to finality. We might say that he often accepted their first-order theses, such as Spinoza's propositions about substance and necessity. He rejected, however, their implied metaphilosophical exclusivism. The general point is thus that we philosophers err mainly insofar as we purport to have the final or definitive word on any issue. On this score, Hegel's claim should be easier for us (than for Schelling or Fichte) to accept, since we less often purport to have the last word on any issue. For a German Idealist, a systematic philosopher drawn to the claims of *Alleinphilosophie*, the situation was clearly more difficult.

Like Schelling, Hegel appealed to the example of Spinoza in his discussion of philosophical refutation. This reflects the high regard in which both held their predecessor, as well as the fact that neither philosopher considered orthodox Spinozism to be a live option for philosophers of the German Golden Age. Spinoza was both a consistent thinker and a saintly human being, and we already saw how Fichte and

Schelling agreed that any theory of philosophical disagreement should give both facts their due. Fichte claimed that Spinoza's philosophy was mere theory, a point that Kant had already implied in his *Critique of Judgment* (Kant 2002: 342). Schelling countered that since Spinoza's philosophy was not mere theory, there must be more than one path to the truth. Hegel's position on this question is as inclusive as Schelling's, but his sense of inclusion is more theoretical.

Hegel's concern is not limited to the practical or ethical portions of philosophy that preoccupied Schelling's *Letters*. His worry lies rather with logic, metaphysics and modal theory. How does one address a consistent determinist theory such as we find in Spinoza's *Ethics*? This question arises at the close of the second book of the *Logic*, which contains a lengthy dialectical analysis of the concepts of substance and necessity. The third book then opens with the question of how Hegel's own metaphysics can progress beyond what Spinoza had achieved. He begins with the same acknowledgement that Schelling had paid to Spinoza, namely, that the latter cannot be refuted by anyone who 'presupposes the freedom and self-sufficiency of the self-conscious subject' (WdL, W6, 250).

Deep into his *Logic*, then, Hegel remembers the exact lesson of his friend's *Letters*: the idealist's claim that the determinist falls into a performative contradiction results only from the idealist's own assumption. The argument by Kant and Fichte against determinism is too much like Dr Johnson's ungenerous retort to Berkeley:¹¹ that great lexicographer imagined that kicking a stone was a response to the Bishop's metaphysics, and so he displayed what Schelling would call 'the despotism of narrow minds'. More magnanimous than Dr Johnson, Schelling rather acknowledged that Spinoza 'had done away with the concept of a subject before he set up his own postulate'. This quite clearly begs the question, however, of whether Spinoza was right to 'do away with' the concept of the subject.

Hegel of course is famous for arguing that substance is also subject, so we know that he will decide ultimately with Fichte, and against Spinoza, on the substantive matter of dispute. First, however, he addresses the manner rather than the matter of dispute. He gives a more general reflection on the nature of refutation: 'Refutation must not come from the outside, i.e. it must not depart from assumptions that lie outside the system under consideration ... genuine refutation must instead insert itself into the strength of the opposition and place itself in the circle of its strengths' (WdL, W6, 250).

An exclusivist could assent to this idea in the abstract. The assertion of contested premises, most would admit, does not account for genuine argument in the interpersonal sense of this word. The basic point belongs to argumentative protocol. But the application of the point rests in the details of our debates with other philosophers, and it is important to pay attention again to characteristic historical examples. How do our favourite philosophers, for instance, handle scepticism? How do the defenders of freedom handle determinism? It is common in philosophy to dismiss these more extreme tendencies, referring to them as unpalatable or unintuitive. But in such cases the sceptic easily retorts. There are, after all, no guarantees that the truth will be easy to stomach, or that it will agree with what some philosophers call pre-philosophical intuitions. In these types of debate the sceptic always gets the better of the argument.

No one refutes the sceptic, then, by devising arguments premised on the assumption that we know things. That is always the matter under dispute with them. Likewise, no one refutes the determinist by presupposing that we have free choice. Spinoza had well enough explained the appearance of choice as illusory,¹² just as he had defined consciousness itself as a type of ignorance.¹³ Contrary to what Dr Johnson presumed, Berkeley had well accounted for phenomena such as inertia¹⁴ and for the experience of pain. Hegel attempts to engage all these philosophical positions (scepticism, determinism, idealism, etc.) by meeting them in their own playground: to refute the sceptic one must first practice scepticism and acknowledge its practicability and legitimacy. Likewise, to refute the determinist one must, as Schelling claimed to have done, sympathetically and imaginatively live through the deterministic philosophy. But Hegel puts a twist on this idea: he tries to infer freedom from determinism and to justify our knowledge by beginning with scepticism. He places all these arguments within a supposed dialectical whole that he believed to reveal the truth behind each.

This is all well and good in the abstract, of course. The details of Hegel's actual arguments about scepticism and determinism should decide whether he made good on this claim, and to assess that one would have to examine fully Hegel's positions on knowledge and freedom. The issue in this chapter lies, however, only with his metaphilosophy, and so with the more general claims he made about his relationship to his various predecessors. What we have from Hegel on this front is too often a lot of rhetoric about inclusion, which understandably strikes non-Hegelians as either empty or confusing. When we adopt the philosophies of our predecessors, Hegel tells us repeatedly, we may raise their thinking onto a higher plane: 'The sole refutation of Spinozism can consist only in first recognizing its standpoint as essential and necessary, and then lifting this standpoint out of itself into a higher one' (WdL, W6, 250).

We need to be vigilant in how we evaluate these points by Hegel: the rhetoric of 'higher standpoints' does not easily translate into a persuasive argument. It would not be enough to say to our interlocutors: 'I acknowledge your standpoint as necessary, but I wish to raise it into a higher one.' In the abstract this is not much better than assuming some premises that they deny. Perhaps it is even worse because it strikes some as patronizing. But the devil here is also in the details, and to genuinely assess these claims by Hegel one needs to look more deeply at the actual arguments: to what extent are the doctrines of Spinoza, for instance his concept of substance, actually included in Hegel's *Logic*? The latter purports to include the former. Whether it does is another question that, again, is open to evaluation.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Hegel draws two important metaphilosophical conclusions from his rhetorical point, and this much holds even if he did not, as he hoped to do, execute the logical arguments about substance to the satisfaction of every examiner. The point in question is that Hegel must deny that there is, strictly speaking, an intellectual object called 'Hegel's philosophy', and that we could examine this object next to a different one, a 'Spinoza's philosophy' or a Fichte's philosophy.¹⁶ So we can read Hegel in these passages as taking the exclusivist argument a step further. Previously he had claimed, in a passage discussed above, that the appearance of personal idiosyncrasies is what raised the problem of pluralism. Now he purports to have removed the very appearance of plurality: there is not a Spinoza's philosophy to examine next to a Fichte's

or Schelling's. There is only one 'science of logic', only one 'phenomenology of mind', even if there are more books with those titles.

Hegel draws a second, negative point that he restates in his analysis of nearly every philosopher. If we ask what, for Hegel, is false in Spinoza's philosophy (setting aside for a moment that we have just finished denying the existence of such a philosophy), we get the answer about the appearance of finality. Whereas for Fichte, the straightforward exclusivist, what is false in Spinoza is the denial of particular propositions (i.e. those about freedom and the self), for Hegel the falsity of Spinozism lies in something more general. We might rather say that Spinoza's error is metaphilosophical, and that his execution of the first-order arguments about substance is perfectly adequate. In other words, such philosophers do not err in asserting what they do, but only in taking their particular assertions to represent the last word in a dispute, namely, to be right in their opposition to those who assert the contrary. The exclusivist flaw is a second-order one: it lies in neglecting the point that any philosophy or position that we construct is just a single development in a larger context. Our subsequent two arguments offer versions of this larger context.

Dialectic and the argument from propositional truth

The second problem that we have to consider is Hegel's view of propositional truth. Hegel's detailed treatment of this subject appears early in the third book of the *Logic*, shortly after his remarks about refutation.¹⁷ In his chapter on judgement he argues, amongst many other things, that we cannot interpret philosophical assertions like 'the soul is immortal' on analogy with positive judgements such as 'the rose is red'. These statements differ as to their logical form, and much of the controversies of philosophy dissolve when we learn better to appreciate the logical and semantic form of metaphysical conclusions.

In this section I wish to focus more narrowly on what Hegel writes about specifically metaphysical propositions, but without considering his position on the logical form of such statements. In the introductory sections to his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, he gives a more straightforward and accessible account of controversies in philosophy such as the debates on the immortality of the soul. In those passages Hegel applies a version of sceptical equipollence, though his method differs from what we find amongst the ancients. The ancient sceptics had employed the method of opposing arguments to reach a state of release (*ataraxia*) from worries about the truth. One assertion is as good as another, and it is better for us, the sceptics claim, to free ourselves from attachment to either side of a debate. Hegel's procedure is a sort of reverse of what the ancient sceptics advised: he encourages us to isolate the truth in each competing claim such as 'the soul is mortal' and 'the soul is immortal'.

In Hegel's books this method of opposing arguments combines also with his customary rhetoric – we hope of course that it is more than mere rhetoric – about 'higher truths':

The dogmatism of the metaphysics of the understanding consists in considering one-sided categories of thought in isolation, whereas the idealism of speculative

philosophy demonstrates the principle of totality that reaches beyond the one-sidedness of these abstract categories. Idealism would thus say: the soul is neither finite nor infinite, but is rather just as well the one as the other and thereby neither one nor the other. I.e., such categories in their isolation are invalid, but rather are validated only as *aufgehoben*.

(ENZ, §32 Z)

The more precise reference point for this idea in classical German philosophy is, of course, not so much ancient scepticism as it is the Kantian doctrine of *Antinomy*.¹⁸ Is the soul finite? There are arguments that it is. Is the soul infinite?¹⁹ There are arguments that it is. How do we assess and compare the arguments? The Kantian approach, on some understandings at least, undercuts the question. It acknowledges that there are good arguments to such conclusions, but insists that the conclusions themselves transcend the reach of argumentation. Reason, Kant tells us with that classic Germanic reification, produces for itself questions that it cannot answer. The Kantian position on what we call 'metametaphysics' is thus a sceptical one.

Hegel accepts the premises of Kantian argumentation, but he gives it a more positive spin. His dialectical argument allows for argumentative equipollence wherever this arises – dialectics after all is a method of inclusion – but it purports to validate each of the steps in the argument. The soul is finite but also infinite, and so neither exclusively one nor the other. Humans are free but we are also determined. The trick to Hegelian metaphysics lies always in the reconciliation of such positions, together with the meta-thesis that each position is 'one-sided' and needs to be *aufgehoben*.

So Hegel extends Schelling's inclusivism to theoretical matters by combining the diverse positions of previous philosophers (freedom and determinism, etc.) into a single argument. A direct consequence of this is that isolated propositions or philosophical assertions are not true, strictly speaking, independently of their opposed theses. Hegel no longer thought, as the young Schelling did, that the determinist and the libertarian meet at the top. They meet rather as middle points in the larger argument of philosophy. Each such position is even theoretically only a half-truth, or true only as part of a larger whole.

Critics will argue that Hegel's idea here equivocates on 'true', and they are right to do so. Truth no longer meaningfully opposes falsity. The Hegelian inclusivist enters every debate with the conviction that each side will have its share of the truth. 'The truth is the whole', Hegel memorably declares in the opening passages of his *Phenomenology*. But the exclusivist will be right to object that the very idea of truth gets lost in this. Just that was the point of exclusivism in the first place: it seems as if the very idea of philosophy, the idea of a pursuit of truth, is overturned when we allow such pluralism to enter the equation.

The argument from history

Hegel translated these theoretical claims – the self is both free and determined, the soul both mortal and immortal, etc. – onto the historical plane. Like the young Schelling, he credits both Fichte and Spinoza with having expressed a partial truth. Unlike the

young Schelling, however, he purports to have given detailed arguments on all the substantive issues. The self is both free and determined, and Hegel claims to have given the detailed arguments on this score in his *Philosophy of Right*, though scholars of that work too often emphasize Hegel's rejection of determinism than his more positive construal of it.²⁰ The soul is mortal and immortal, and again Hegel purports (somewhat less credibly),²¹ to have given the detailed arguments. All Spinoza's arguments about substance, as well as Fichte's about the freedom of the subject, get placed by him into their proper logical contexts.

At the close of his system, Hegel recounts a certain history of philosophy. He treats it as the appearance within the past of the various doctrines and arguments of philosophy. His claim is that ultimately that these philosophies – though each appeared in history in a materially independent form, expressed as the doctrines of individual humans – have all been incorporated into his own system. The history of philosophy, he claims in his conclusion, was just the unfolding in time of the one, true philosophy (viz. his own philosophy): 'The general result of the history of philosophy is ... that through all times *there has only been one philosophy*, the simultaneous differences among which constitute the necessary sides of a single principle' (VGP III, W20, 461).

He did not need to resort to the metaphilosophically implausible assumption that his predecessors had committed only errors, but he could instead accept that many philosophies had been true, in some respects or in some ways at least. He accomplished this, however, only by adopting the rather dubious assumption that all the philosophies in history are at bottom only one philosophy. They form one big whole that a sufficiently ambitious professor, such as himself, could unify into a series of texts.

In the context of the problem of exclusivism, however, Hegel's conclusion is a reasonable one: if there is only one true philosophy, and yet many variants have appeared in history, then all the true historically actual philosophies have been mere appearances of the one philosophy. This inference would appear to hold for anyone who seeks to avoid, as Hegel clearly did, the more unpalatable consequences of exclusivism while preserving the basic argument (beginning with the system hypothesis) as Fichte had set it out. This metaphilosophical doctrine – the various philosophies that have appeared in history resolve into a single whole – is also the conclusion of Hegel's entire philosophy as he presented it in order. His system has 'history of philosophy' as its end, just the end of the history of philosophy is his resolution of the previous philosophies into one. This is a big thought, and it presents the premises (i.e. the system hypothesis and the exclusivist thesis) of *Alleinphilosophie* brought to their extreme consequences.

To take up this question with two centuries of retrospect, however, we need to consider the *modus tollens* to Hegel's *modus ponens*. My own argument will be that since we cannot reasonably take the canonical (Kantian and Hegelian) histories of philosophy to represent a successful account of philosophy in its complete development – indeed, to take it as such would require us to adopt the most worrisome assumptions in his corpus, such as that Africa had no *Geist* and that the intellectual developments of modern, colonial Europe were necessary, complete and universal – then there cannot be a single true philosophy. Fichte's exclusivism, which Hegel developed into a kind of totalizing historical theory, falls under the weight of the Eurocentrism that was its

actual, historical conclusion. We need to take more seriously these provincial aspects of these German thinkers.

Metahistorical pluralism: Or, how to be an Hegelian and a pluralist

Not long ago, some attendees at a philosophy conference were gossiping about the philosophy department of a university in our region. There had been infights, as there so often are, and a newer member had been appointed as department head. At this point I interjected, insisting that the administrators had done well to select their very capable Hegel scholar to head the department. 'We Hegelians,' I bragged, 'are good diplomats because we include everyone.' The remainder of the company, being no great fans of Hegel, failed to appreciate my point. One eavesdropper to the discussion added, 'at the cost of nullifying them.' There is something right in that. Hegelian inclusion is not always so complimentary. Our interlocutors hope to be right, or at least understood, and it is strange if we seek to 'reduce them to negative moments.' No one wishes to be *aufgehoben*.

In this concluding section I hope to mitigate this worry by specifying what I see as the upshot of the lines of argument considered above. We philosophers, at our best, combine a commitment to truth, namely the virtue of the exclusivist, with the empathy and high-mindedness of the pluralist. The question is still, as it was already for the young Schelling, a matter of how these impulses combine. It is arguable that they did not combine so well in these idealists of old. For all their argumentative power, their comprehensiveness and their understanding of the depths of the human mind, these philosophers (Hegel not excepted) had unreasonable pretensions for their own intellectual work: even if we accept the premises of *Alleinphilosophie* – namely, in the big picture there is only one correct theory of the world – this fact would not require that any of us should arrive at it. There is a hidden premise, then, in the *execution* of each of the philosophies discussed above.

The hidden premise pertains to our conception of the work of philosophy as completed, or even completable. It is worth looking at how this premise informs the three lines of argument from Hegel that I outlined above. Two of the arguments, in my view, are worth improving, whereas the third indicates the area where this whole venture, the venture of *Alleinphilosophie*, fails. Hegel's argument for an inclusive philosophy, I maintain, falls apart due to his inadequate appreciation of historiography as constructive. Nonetheless, there is an important lesson to be drawn from each of Hegel's arguments.

The lesson of the first argument is easiest to appreciate: the flaw in philosophical assertions tends to lie in a certain presumption of finality. We Hegelians often struggle with the oppositional nature of philosophical disputes. What is the right position in metaphysics? Physicalism or dualism? There is something true in the Hegelian claim that neither side *can* have the whole truth. The reason for this is that the way the questions are framed dictates something of the kinds of arguments, positions and assertions that arise. The Hegelian who enters these disputes does not offer a facile reconciliation to the participants (the reconciliation is the difficult part!). We rather

seek to uncover how the presuppositions in question limit the types of answers on offer. The Hegelian does not thereby reject the question. We wish rather to draw out the presuppositions, as a result of which the questions ultimately change. There is something true in determinism (our actions are always and everywhere the result of causes of which we are mainly ignorant), and yet something true in libertarianism (freedom is the basis of morality, justice and personhood). It is not a matter of simply softening these sides of the answer so as to make them formally 'compatible', but rather of rigorously reassessing the notions of freedom and cause that underlie them. Hegel's often too formulaic reflections about how the truth is the whole, or how each side has the part of the truth, make more sense when treated as informal reminders that the philosophical process requires us to recognize the limits of such abstract positions.

It is likewise true that isolated propositions or theses tend to be inadequate expressions of the philosophical spirit. Our colleagues, when they are not Hegelians, seek definite premises from which they might draw isolated propositions. There is something attractive, to many of us, in Hegel's rejection of this 'activity of the understanding'. There are shortcomings in the philosophical thesis as such, just as there is a contrary vice to be found in the (too frequent amongst some schools of philosopher) avoidance of clear theses and arguments. To be a Hegelian pluralist, then, requires that we seek a maximum of argumentative clarity and explicitness (viz., that we concede as a matter of procedure to the demand for distinct propositions and inferences) while retaining some degree of scepticism about the adequacy of the propositional form.

But the flaw in Hegel's argumentation lies in his assumption that his history constituted a single and comprehensive whole. He concluded his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* by proclaiming that 'the sequence of philosophical systems is not a contingent development, but rather constitutes a necessary and progressive development of a science' (VGP III, W20, 461). This is not a thesis that we can easily accept, especially if we add a premise that Hegel did not consider. The very notion of a 'history of philosophy', as Hegel conceived it, depended on the entirely contingent collection of materials, authors and concepts as they were available to a Prussian professor in the 1820s. As in the other metaphilosophical domains we have mentioned, Hegel's thinking on this subject is an extension of that of his contemporaries. The whole idea that the history of philosophy should present a system, and that its developments should have the philosophical form of necessity – as if one philosopher's ideas were a plain inference from another's – and completeness, is likewise a relic of the *Alleinphilosophen*. Hegel was merely extending the arguments that Reinhold put forward on this subject in 1793, and contrasting the particulars to the likes of Tennemann and other Kantians.²²

But there is nothing necessary in the decision by Hegel and his German predecessors, for instance, that Greek literature be promoted over the productions of other ancient civilizations. The path-breaking researches of Peter Park (2013) have revealed that this very decision was a slow and careful one, and conceived largely as a justification of Europe's relationship to the rest of the world. There is thus, we should rather hope, nothing but contingency in the fact that Hegel placed just those philosophers in his history of philosophy. Once we remove the false sense of unity and completeness from his materials, we eliminate also the temptation to take Hegel's account of

anything for final. Hegel, once we recognize this metahistorical problem – the fact that he constructed his arguments from the materials available to him as a matter of contingent historical circumstances – is just one amongst the dead philosophers, and not one whose particular aims we could reasonably attempt to resurrect. That provides the decisive refutation of his variation on *Alleinphilosophie*.

Notes

- 1 In the former case this pertains to 'the vigorous nature (*die ganze sthenische Beschaffenheit*)' of Fichte's philosophizing.
- 2 For Fichte the terms are not equivalent as such, but (Fichte 1994: 16) 'a consistent dogmatist is also necessarily a materialist.'
- 3 From Fichte's 'Second Introduction' (Fichte 1994: 98): 'Spinoza could not have been convinced of his own philosophy. He could only have *thought* of it; he could not have *believed* it. For this is a philosophy that directly contradicts those convictions that Spinoza must necessarily have adopted in his everyday life, by virtue of which he had to consider himself to be free and self-sufficient.'
- 4 Breazeale numbers Fichte's formulations of the system at 'no fewer than sixteen' (Fichte 1994: ix)
- 5 This is a much-understudied aspect of our histories. For an interesting take, see Park (2013) and my own (Harrelson 2012).
- 6 Fichte (1987).
- 7 Fichte (2005). See also Nuzzo (2008).
- 8 On the subject of Schelling's break with Fichte, see Bruno (2013).
- 9 Regarding the conflicts amongst Hellenistic schools, he writes: 'he who has reflected upon Stoicism and Epicureanism, the two most opposite moral systems, has readily found that both meet in the same ultimate goal' (Schelling 1980: 188).
- 10 Quotes from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* are from Nisbet's translation.
- 11 See Patey (1986).
- 12 Spinoza (1925: 2:77–83).
- 13 LeBuffe (2010).
- 14 Silver (1973).
- 15 For a few recent attempts to Hegel's argument against Spinoza in this part of the Logic, see Knappik (2015) and di Giovanni (2005).
- 16 For an argument relative to this, see Brandom (2005).
- 17 'Das Urteil' (WdL, W6, 301–351); I have tried to outline some of the metaphilosophical elements of Hegel's chapter in my own (Harrelson 2015).
- 18 A recent, more detailed account of Hegel's antinomies that orients the argument equally to Kant and Sextus is to be found in Heidemann (2013).
- 19 These are Hegel's examples, which differ from Kant's.
- 20 Christopher Yeomans (2011), following Pippin and others, takes the more negative approach to this problem. He opens a section on 'Hegel and the traditional problem of free will' with the claim that 'Hegel is not interested in establishing the compatibility of free will with causal determinism or Leibnizian or Spinozistic metaphysics, since he thinks that all three of these doctrines are false' (Yeomans 2011: 6). This approach, however, is not obviously compatible with Hegel's actual

statements about Leibniz and Spinoza, nor with his concepts of philosophy and its history.

- 21 Paul Redding (2014) summarizes the situation thusly: ‘On the issue of the immortality of the soul, Hegel’s defence seemed equally worrying. Hegel rarely seemed to say anything as simple as affirming or denying that the soul was immortal, but would direct his attention to the problems of the conception of time presupposed by the opposing concepts “mortal” and “immortal”’
- 22 On these subjects see some recent works by Bondeli (2015) and de Boer (2017).

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Part Four

Hegel's Metaphilosophy and Contemporary Thought

How to survive Hegel's Absolute: Koyré, Kojève, Hyppolite and Metaphilosophy

Jamila M.H. Mascot

To what extent can the French reception of Hegel in the twentieth century, marked as it was by 'fascination and misunderstanding' and, in particular, the works of Alexandre Koyré, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite, be read as displaying a metaphilosophical import (Jarczyk and Labarrière 1996: 19)? Literature on metaphilosophy offers multiple definitions of the subject that would probably encourage conflicting appraisals of the relevance of metaphilosophy for the *Hegel-Forschung* and of the significance of twentieth-century Hegelianism for the debate on metaphilosophy (Miolli 2017). However, this contribution does not aim at punctually addressing the many definitions at stake in the debate to ponder their pertinence with regards to the wide field of Hegelian studies. Its aim, instead, is to reveal the metaphilosophical resonances at play in the philosophical meditations that took shape from the 1930s onwards throughout the French reception of Hegel, at a time when, as Alain Badiou (2012: 57) put it, the 'Hegelian virus' was spreading everywhere.

This chapter argues that a significant portion of the story of French Hegelianism – a story 'that has often been told' (Barnett 1998: 13) and to which a wide amount of relatively recent scholarship has been devoted (Descombes 1981; Roth 1988; Kelly 1992; Mudimbe and Bohm 1994; Jarczyk and Labarrière 1996; Butler 1999; Baugh 2003; Badiou 2012; Bianco and Fruteau de Laclos 2016) – constitutes a fruitful ground for digging into the metaphilosophical implications of Hegel's dialectic. The chapter, thus, investigates through a close reading of key texts by Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite how, according to the very terms proposed by Robert B. Ware (1996, 1999), the theoretical debate opened up by some of the brightest protagonists of French Hegelianism, raised and tried to solve *ante litteram* metaphilosophical issues.

Metaphilosophical resonances

In a 1965 article devoted to 'The role of A. Koyré in the development of Hegelian Studies in France', Jean Wahl, the author of *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (1929) and a major representative of the Hegel Renaissance, sharply remarks

the impasse raised 'slightly against Hegel' (Wahl 1965: 335) by Koyré at the end of his 'Hegel à Iéna' (1934) as an *aut-aut* between, on the one hand, the 'dialectical character of time' that enables Hegel's philosophy of history – and the achievement of his philosophy *tout court* – by bringing history to an end and, on the other hand, 'the temporal character of the dialectic' that, by granting a future to history, does not allow for the completion of the system (Koyré 1971: 189). Actually, Koyré did not answer the dilemma he formulated: in his view, both options were viable – although mutually excluding – but none of them in fact could allow Hegel's philosophy to be consistent with its own premises. Koyré passed the puzzle down to Kojève and Hyppolite, the two most authoritative interpreters of Hegel in France who were going to occupy the centre stage of the French philosophical scene for the next two decades. Indeed, both Kojève and Hyppolite seem to have been inspired by the aporetic dilemma that Koyré discretely grasped at the heart of Hegel's philosophy. To that extent, Kojève's *Le Concept, le Temps, le Discours. Introduction au Système du Savoir* (1953) and Hyppolite's *Logique et existence* (1952) can be interpreted as distinct efforts at resignifying Hegel's claim for an Absolute that both is historically rooted and expresses a supra-historical truth.

What is actually metaphilosophical about the thrilling interpretations of Hegel proposed by Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite is precisely the effort the three authors made to investigate the speculative status of Hegelian philosophy in the history of philosophy, and more specifically of the speculative legacy of Hegel's philosophy for contemporary thought. What can philosophy be and do *after Hegel*? What is it like to philosophize *after Hegel*? A similar concern, that was going to haunt the landscape of French philosophy for a long time, resonates in Foucault's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (1970), where he succeeded to his former *maître* Hyppolite: 'Can any philosophy continue to exist that is no longer Hegelian? Are the non-Hegelian elements in our thought necessarily non-philosophical? Is that which is anti-philosophical necessarily non-Hegelian?' (Foucault 1972: 236). Such questions conjure and challenge the very relation that Hegel established between his own philosophy and history – *Concept* and *Time* (to borrow from Kojève), *Logic* and *Existence* (to borrow from Hyppolite) – in the ambitious attempt to avoid both dangers of 'a truth without history and of a history without truth' (Bodei 2014: 214). In this respect, Ware's suggestion that Hegel's metaphilosophy takes shape at the intersection between the logic, the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy as the self-comprehension of its historical unfolding, offers a remarkable clue for approaching the *constellation* of thoughts inaugurated by the works of Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite as a metaphilosophical matter (Ware 1996, 1999).

While proposing an interpretation of the metaphilosophical character of Hegelian philosophy, Ware highlights the manifest inconsistency of two fundamental stances simultaneously attributed to Hegel: on the one hand, a conservative characterization of philosophy as mere 'comprehension' of the spirit of its time, which always comes *ex post*, and on the other hand, the conviction that 'his system involved an absolute truth beyond which no philosophy could advance' (1996: 253). The author aims at dispelling both misunderstandings. For him, Hegel's philosophy is neither merely retrospective nor drastically definitive. It is rather productive and progressive insofar as 'the achievement of philosophical self-consciousness ... can signal the direction

which the new actuality must take' (Ware 1996: 263). Ware points to 'the movement of the Concept' as that which brings to self-consciousness the ageing epoch and opens up the transition to the new one. To that extent, he argues that it 'is not a terminal truth we achieve at the end of the process so much as a knowledge of the *method* according to which the process will continue', and he convincingly concludes that 'Hegelian philosophy does not mark the point at which the process stops, but the point from which it proceeds self-consciously' (Ware 1996: 275–276). In other words, according to Ware, Absolute Knowing marks for philosophy the speculative achievement of 'absolute self-consciousness', namely the 'self-consciousness of the historical development of self-consciousness' and that of the immanent necessity of its logical self-determination: Hegel's philosophy *qua* absolute self-consciousness thus displays a proper metaphilosophical function (Ware 1996: 275–276).

The insights stemming from the works of Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite can be used to complicate the outcomes of Ware's account. While Ware pacifies the relation between the speculative and the historical identified as part and parcel of the absolute self-consciousness of Hegelian (meta)philosophy as the two sides of the same coin (the coin being the *method* for the deployment of philosophy, endowed with both historicity and logical structure), the three interpreters adopt a quite different theoretical attitude with regards to the issue, polarizing paradoxes and inconsistencies that, in their views, result from the speculative assumptions underlying the notion of the Absolute and its relation to history. In that sense, French Hegelianism proves to be able to grasp and deepen some of the crucial metaphilosophical questions that Hegel's philosophy raised for its posterity, by asking, in Koyré's terms, 'how to dialectically connect time to eternity: *sine confusio dualitatis nec separationem unitatis*' (1971: 212).

Indeed, as Michael Roth argues, 'in most of its forms French Hegelianism was a vehicle for confronting the historical, for thinking about the connection between history and knowing' (1988: 2). But for the French Hegelians the problem of how to provide significance to history had to be raised and solved within the conceptual margins allowed by Hegel's dialectic. How can eternal truth manifest itself into time? How can eternity relate to the becoming of the *Weltgeschichte*? How can the temporal make room for the eternal? How can the logic account for the comprehension of history? Those are precisely the 'metaphilosophical' questions to which Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite devoted a good amount of intellectual energy in the effort to make sense of Hegel's philosophy.

By raising questions about the very consistency of the logical and the historical scope of Hegel's speculation (in his words, the *dialectical* and the *temporal*), Koyré can be considered as the initiator of such a fruitful debate. Kojève's contribution – especially his late systematic endeavour – represents an extravagant attempt to restore consistency to Hegel's philosophy and to its controversial thesis of the *fin de l'histoire*, a thesis that nevertheless ends up raising at least another major philosophical inconsistency: how could, as a matter of fact, (Kojève's) philosophy survive the end of history and the end of philosophy that Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* had allegedly declared already in 1830? Instead, Hyppolite's undertaking to look into the 'insurmountable difficulties' of Hegel's dialectic appears at once as a reprise of Koyré's original dilemma and as a response to Kojève's provocative solution to the matter, insofar as Hyppolite

(1997: 186) counters the idea of the closing of the system and rather focuses on the *event* of the Absolute in history – what J.-L. Nancy would have later called ‘the eventfulness of its event’ (1998: 91).

Koyré and the ‘failure of the Hegelian effort’: Time against the dialectic

The unique aspects of the adventure of Hegel in France have often been highlighted in the copious literature on this subject. While some interpreters have emphasized the several misunderstandings that emerged through such a great hermeneutical season stretching between the 1930s and the 1950s (Jarczyk and Labarrière 1996), and others have proposed distinct and diverging interpretations of the many themes at stake in that legacy and of their intellectual consequences for the history of French philosophy (Dufrenne 1948; Descombes 1981; Roth 1988; Althusser 1997; Butler 1999), everybody agrees on recognizing the all-encompassing dimension of the Hegel Renaissance in France.

Writing in 1948, at the peak of French Hegelianism – one year after the publication of Kojève’s ‘bulky’ *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* by R. Queneau and two years after the publication of Hyppolite’s ‘careful and authoritative’ commentary *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’esprit* in 1946 (Kelly 1983: 203) – Georges Canguilhem (1948: 282) recalled the powerful influence of Hegel on young philosophical minds and stated that his system was probably the ‘most robust’ of any time. Yet, a dedicated reader like Koyré could not avoid pinpointing the tensions that shake the very foundations of Hegel’s ‘robust’ speculative structure and reverberate in particular on his conception of the relation between history and the dialectic.

Koyré’s reading of Hegel focuses ‘on the secular, historical and humanistic thrust of his work’ (Roth 1988: 7). Significantly anticipating the anthropological twist by which Kojève would have later transfigured Hegel’s philosophy, Koyré maintains that ‘Hegelian time is, above all, a *human* time, *the time of man* ... And it is because Hegelian time is *human* that it is also *dialectical*, as much as it is precisely because time is both [human and dialectical] that it is essentially *historical* time’ (1971: 177). For Koyré, Hegel’s philosophy is ‘a philosophy of time’ and most profoundly ‘a philosophy of man’ in spite of its ceaseless effort towards ‘relinking time to eternity, ... to infiltrating time into eternity and eternity into time, thanks to the Bohemian notion of *intemporal* becoming’ (1971: 163). In his 1934 essay on ‘The Hegelian Terminology’, Koyré challenges the idea that the *Geist* would be the ‘eternity of the intemporal immobile’ and argues for its historicity, while raising a crucial question about the deployment of the Absolute across history *and* eternity: if ‘the end of the intemporal development of the Absolute’ is ‘eternally achieved while being eternally pursued’, he asks, ‘are we in eternity or in time?’ (1971: 214–215). Koyré answers that ‘we are of course in both, as only time allows for the achievement of the dialectical unfolding, since only by being negation and death, it is also source of movement and of life’ (1971: 214–215). Time, in other words, constitutes the ‘embodiment’ of the dialectical movement, its *Dasein* (*là-être*) or ‘the here-being of the *Aufheben* itself’

(Koyré 1971: 220). Eternity, on the other hand, should not be thought of 'negatively' as abstracting from time or outside of time (Koyré 1971: 219). History, in turn, seems to prefigure a peculiar synthesis of time and eternity: 'History', Koyré writes, 'is the life of spirit in itself, it is its being rather than its there-being (*là-être*) ... It overcomes the past as much as it overcomes time' (1971: 221). Indeed, History incarnates a 'victory over time' – namely, a victory over 'negation and death that time hosts inside itself' – as much as it represents an incorporation of time and its becoming. Additionally, conceived as *begriffne Geschichte*, History is not merely a recollection of past events but also the present manifestation of truth: 'what is true is eternally in and for itself, it is not yesterday or tomorrow, but simply and absolutely present, "nunc" in the sense of the absolute present' (Koyré 1971: 221).

In 'Hegel à Iéna', Koyré analyses as a paradigmatic case of 'the *modus procedendi* of Hegelian thought' the 'identity between logic and history' that represents the major ground of Hegel's philosophy of history and of his philosophy as such (Koyré 1971: 162–163). He sharply outlines the parallelism existing between Hegel's conceptual pair of time and eternity with another fundamental pair of his dialectic, that of finite and infinite. If *becoming* is what is at stake in the former, *Unruhe* (unrest) is what characterizes the latter, since both the finite and the infinite are 'agitated' and moved by the necessity of surpassing their own limits. 'Movement, unrest, annihilation, suppression and engendering, being of the non-being and non-being of the being: aren't these traits already known? Doesn't the dialectic of the finite and the infinite reproduce, or rather [shall I say] announce that of eternity and time? Or simply that of time?' (Koyré 1971: 165–167).

For Koyré, it is hard to conceive of a dialectic of eternity unfolding in time, although this is, in his view, the goal that Hegel has attempted to reach. He thus maintains that Hegel thinks of the dialectical unfolding of time or the 'self-constitution of the concept of time' – which is not an abstract entity, but rather 'life' and 'spirit' – through the prism of the dialectic of infinity that appears already in his Jena *Logic* of 1804–1805 (Koyré 1971: 175). But how can such dialectic of time in fact *actualize* eternity? Precisely, Koyré suggests, by *representing* it in its opposite, by bringing it into the present, into time. The dialectic of eternity 'needs to re-present itself in that of the instant, that it constitutes itself in and through time' (Koyré 1971: 176–177). On the other hand, it is because of its ability to present eternity within itself that human time *qua* historical and dialectical time allows for the 'self-constitution of Spirit and for its enriching in the course of the historical evolution'; it is by this means that it achieves that 'identity of history and logic in which we have rightly identified the essence of the Hegelian system' (Koyré 1971: 178). If time can be at the origin of such a process, it is once again because 'Hegelian spirit is time and Hegelian time is Spirit', Koyré (1971: 179) concludes.

However, Koyré is not satisfied with the Hegelian conception according to which 'the dialectical nature of the instant ensures the contact and co-penetration of Time and Eternity' and he cannot but stumble upon what he considers 'in the last instance, [as] the failure of Hegel's effort': 'if time is dialectical and if it constructs itself *from* the yet-to-come, it is, whatever Hegel says, eternally incomplete' (1971: 188–189). This means that Hegel's dialectic of time while, on the one hand, conceptually allowing for

his philosophy of history and the achievement of the Absolute – namely, for Hegel's philosophy to be an accomplished system – relies, on the other hand, on the yet-to-come, on the *incompleteness* of time that does not allow for a philosophy of history (nor for the system to be accomplished). In Koyré's words, the impasse is formulated as follows:

Thus, only the dialectical character of time makes a philosophy of history possible, but at the same time, the temporal character of the dialectic makes it impossible. For the philosophy of history, whether one likes it or not, is its interruption ... Philosophy of history—and through it Hegelian philosophy, the 'system'—, would only be possible if history ended, if there were no longer any yet-to-come (future), only if time could stop. It might be that Hegel believed this. It is even possible that he believed that this was not merely the essential condition of the system—it is only at the falling of the dusk that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings—but also that this essential condition was *already* realized, that history had effectively ended, and that it is precisely for this reason that he could—and that he was able to—accomplish it.

(Koyré 1971: 189)

Such 'failure' that Koyré locates so meticulously in the entanglement of logic and history at the heart of Hegelian dialectic, results from an aporia of the system that eventually seems unable to honour its promises, namely the promise of an absolute totality conceived as both infinite and complete (Mascot 2017). Kojève and Hyppolite can be thought of as the heirs of the aporia that has been raised by Koyré at the very end of his 'Hegel à Iéna'. Although no explicit quote of this passage appears in their texts, it is undeniable that Koyré's concern resonates in their late works of the 1950s. Thus, these two key figures of French Hegelianism, traditionally portrayed as oppositional interpreters of Hegel's philosophy, share at least a common theoretical commitment stemming from Koyré's legacy.

Kojève and the 'update' of philosophy at the end of history

Kojève's investigation of Hegel's philosophy owes many insights to Koyré's reading of Hegel. First and foremost, the idea, as Koyré (1971: 188) states, that 'man is essentially dialectic which means essentially negating (*negateur*)', namely capable of negating what is there – the given, the present – in view of what is not yet there – the unpredictable, the future. Secondly, Kojève inherits from Koyré a strongly anthropological inclination premised on the conviction that for Hegel 'the dialectic of time is the dialectic of man' (Koyré 1971: 188). Lastly, Kojève meditates at length on the equation of time and eternity: in Koyré's words, the intuition that in the Hegelian system 'eternity is time itself, the eternal movement of Spirit' (1971: 188). However, Koyré notices the ambiguous and even contradictory nature of Hegel's conception of historical time, concluding that either time is dialectical, and thus also perpetually unachieved and

philosophically not comprehended (a sort of 'bad infinity' constantly postponing its end), or alternatively, *history must come to an end* (so that a philosophy of history can finally embrace the totality of time).

Kojève's thesis of the 'end of history' – together with the drama of the 'struggle for recognition' – is the most revisited *topos* in his original interpretation of Hegel (Vegetti 1999). By far less often revisited are the ambivalent reflections on the 'end of philosophy' eventually replaced by Wisdom at the end of history, that he developed during his colossal attempt at rewriting, after more than a century, the Hegelian System in the guise of a *System of Knowledge* (Kojève 2019). In fact, Kojève is not only the 'unfaithful' translator/commentator of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the inventor of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. While his early philosophy, at the time of his famous seminars at the École des Hautes Etudes, is deeply informed by anthropological concerns, his later thought – in the years following the Second World War, when he starts working as a civil servant for the French Ministry of Finances and Economic Affairs and declares himself a 'Sunday philosopher' (Filoni 2010) – explores the (im) possibility of philosophizing after Hegel and the end of history engaging with proper metaphilosophical concerns.

From the 1950s, Kojève embarked on the monumental project of composing his *Système du Savoir*, which he conceived as a *rewriting*, a *paraphrase* and an *update* of the Hegelian *Encyclopaedia* of 1830. In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1947), Kojève already formulates his popular thesis of the end of history implicitly announcing the death of philosophy. By proclaiming the closure of the circle of philosophical Discourse, which coincides with the *Darstellung* of Hegel's thought, Kojève celebrates the advent of *Wisdom* as the ultimate and unsurpassable knowledge that came on earth to finally bring to an end the centuries-old pursuit of truth epitomized by philosophy. Kojève (1980: 95) emphasizes that Hegel's circular conception of knowledge entails as its most striking consequence the corollary that 'Wisdom can be achieved only at the end of History'. Indeed, if thought is historically rooted, it is only when history ceases and the historical world reaches the stage of 'the *universal* (i.e., nonexpandable) and *homogeneous* (i.e., non-transformable) State' that Knowledge can definitively be completed (Kojève 1980: 95). But then the problem is precisely to determine *when* history ends.

At this stage, Kojève remarks,

One is caught, then, in a *vicious circle*. And Hegel was perfectly aware of this. But he believed he had found a criterion both for the absolute truth of his description of the real ... and for the end of the 'movement' of this real – that is, for the definitive stopping of History. And, curiously enough, this criterion is precisely the *circularity* of his description – that is, of the 'system of science'.

(Kojève 1980: 193).

Hegel, in other words, realizes that his philosophy has *come full circle* and that 'he can only *go around again*' (Kojève 1980: 194), but this is actually the case only insofar as history has finally achieved its goals in the immediate post-1789.

What has happened since then, Kojève explains, was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon. From the authentically historical point of view, the two World Wars with their retinue of large and small revolutions had only the effect of bringing the backward civilizations of the peripheral provinces into line with the most advanced (real or virtual) European historical positions.

(Kojève 1980: 160)

The philosophical implications resulting from his secular requiem for history were to be fully developed in Kojève's late *magnum opus* on the *Système du Savoir*, a project that wrestles with the almost unconceivable task of philosophizing on the end of philosophy once that end has already come to pass.

Most of Kojève's extravagances and exaggerations are often ascribed to his well-known taste for irony. However, engaging with Kojève on his own terms requires serious consideration of his proverbial irony. Following the two main recommendations that introduce his essay 'The Emperor Julian and His Art of Writing' – 'not to take literally everything that the great authors of earlier time wrote, nor to believe that they made explicit in their writings all that they wanted to say in them' (Kojève 1964: 95) – it is possible to reread and reinterrogate Kojève's lapidary assertions on the end of history (and philosophy) after Hegel.

Kojève (2019: 3) presents his majestic writing as a 'simple paraphrase of the Hegelian works in Modern French', as a mere *mise à jour* of Hegel's thought. Yet, the task turns out to be much more complicate than expected: in a letter to Carl Schmitt written in 1956, a few years after inaugurating his ambitious mission, Kojève confesses that his thousand-page manuscript is still nothing more than a 'preparatory exercise' (Kojève and Schmitt 2001: 106). In fact, the 'bookish update of Hegelian Wisdom' that absorbed him for more than a decade was never delivered. Kojève did manage to complete several drafts and fragments (some – namely the ones that should have composed the *Exposé du Système du Savoir* proper – are still unpublished), but the most relevant piece for reconstructing the nature and the aim of his grand project is undoubtedly *Le Concept, le Temps, le Discours*, a posthumous volume collating a few extensive introductions to the System. In the preface to *The Concept, Time and Discourse* Kojève warns the reader against searching it for contradictions, since he will certainly find many. Although Kojève does not provides any further explanation of the contradictions he mentions, a *symptomal reading* of the whole architecture of the project reveals the inconsistencies permeating this monumental (albeit unfinished) collection of texts.

In the end, Kojève fails to meet his own expectations and finalize the System, composing instead a labyrinthine series of introductions:¹ in place of the unfinished 'System', Kojève delivers seven introductions and two prefaces, for a total of 1,600 *preliminary* pages located, as he states, 'between the title ... and its content strictly so called', namely the *Exposé du Système du Savoir* (2019: 13). Without aiming to reduce Kojève's thought to numbers, the size of his propedeutical discourse testifies to the relevance of this long chain of introductions, whose presence and proliferation the author nevertheless tends to constantly minimize. In Kojève's view, on a conceptual level, introductions do not add anything to the System. However, they fulfil a practical/

pedagogical function that consists in aiding and guiding the reader, so as to make the whole enterprise fully intelligible. Introductions are, according to Kojève, not essential – they are not part of the *Exposé* as they introduce it – but they are nonetheless necessary and indispensable as they provide rationales for comprehending such a counterintuitive attempt at updating Hegel's System of Knowledge, once history has ended, when Hegel's discourse has exhausted all the possibilities of thought and philosophy has been overcome by Wisdom.

It is thus no surprise that Kojève's account ends up overlooking the most remarkable aspect of his introductions: the fact that, as in a sort of Freudian slip, introductions disclose and 'keep alive' the very space for philosophy. Indeed, Kojève's most famous introduction, the one to the *Phenomenology*, that in many ways also constituted a paraphrase and a *mise à jour* of Hegel's seminal text, was actually the speculative fabric whereby, translating and twisting Hegel's words, he elaborated and exposed his own philosophical discourse. In the case of the multiple introductions to the *Système du Savoir*, the very task of introducing the System by connecting Time and Concept through the Discourse displays the status of a proper philosophical exercise. In the introductions, Kojève is thus philosophizing *malgré soi*, relinking Concept to Time, namely, updating the Concept and its speculative truth according to his own times. If History has ended with Hegel, if nothing 'new' can happen in this world since then, as Kojève repeatedly states, Time is manifestly still flowing. It is for Kojève a Time without events, a Time without History and without importance, but the philosopher is still supposed to engage with it to restage and articulate its identification with the Concept. In other words, Time needs to be *comprehended* and this is precisely the unique task of Philosophy (but what is this Time that needs to be comprehended and updated if not historical time? In that case, couldn't the persistence of Philosophy argue in favour of a perpetuation of History?).

Kojève conceives his System as the final seal of his speculative argument about the end of human history. Quite to the opposite, the *Système du Savoir*, by which he meant to definitively prove both the obsolescence and the impossibility of Philosophy in the age of Wisdom, shows – almost as a *lapsus* and against Kojève's declared intentions – that philosophy actually survives. Philosophy in fact takes charge of the historical time in which, according to Kojève, Wisdom has already actualized itself completely. It is, in the last instance, the work of Philosophy to *retune* the Concept to Time, relinking the temporal and the atemporal, a connection without which the Concept would collapse into a cold realm of abstractions instead of attaining the completion of the Absolute. If the Concept is constantly and vitally obliged to confront itself with the existent, this means that philosophy is constantly and fatally needed to carry on its speculative tasks throughout the evolution of Time. At this stage, another meaningful question arises, one that Kojève does not formulate, but to which he nevertheless – and once again *malgré soi* – provides an answer: does Kojève's wisdom actually eliminate Philosophy?

For Kojève, Philosophy stands for a preliminary and external route to Wisdom. The fundamental issue is whether such preliminaryity can be eliminated or should be considered as necessary and unavoidable. In the Kojévian scheme, Philosophy performs the role of an *ancilla sophiae*. Unlike Wisdom, Philosophy depends on its

relation to the becoming of history and the flowing of time. This is why only Philosophy can guarantee the *updating* of Absolute Knowing, reconnecting to history the eternal Truth that raises itself above the temporal. Yet, if the Absolute is a '*result* of historical *becoming*', or 'Eternity engendered by Time', it seems that, precisely for its own sake, it cannot sever its link with Time (Kojève 1980: 149). Kojève categorically affirms the opposite by announcing, with the end of History and the emergence of Wisdom, the impossibility for Philosophy of continuing to exist. However, his major attempt to set out the evidence for his theses turns out to be a magnificent philosophical dissertation – his own Discourse as a *mise à jour* of Hegel's – on the very necessity for Philosophy to keep itself alive as the only site where the Absolute can finally be recounted. Far from vanishing, Philosophy thus survives both the Hegelian Absolute and Kojève's Wisdom, and it does so, as suggested by Kojève – mostly against his will – by advocating as its *raison d'être* the task of perpetually taking charge of Time and constantly restaging its link to the atemporal.

Hyppolite and the 'absolute genesis of sense' in history

In the §23 of the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel writes that 'there is talk of humility or modesty or, alternatively, haughtiness in connection with philosophizing, and if humility or modesty consists in ascribing to one's subjectivity nothing *particular* about one's qualities and actions, then philosophizing will at least have to be acquitted of haughtiness' (EL, §23 R; ENZ, §23 Anm.).² Such praise of the 'modesty' of genuine philosophy may be read anachronistically as a tribute to Hyppolite's dedicated interpretation of Hegel, whose sober approach is traditionally contrasted with Kojève's flamboyant and 'arrogant' reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Interestingly enough, Hyppolite (1991: 239) himself acknowledges that compared to Kojève's approach to Hegel – 'so rich, so personal, and often so right' – his work 'wanted to be more modest and fix for itself a more limited goal'. However, thanks to the 'modesty' of his hermeneutics as well as to his academic prestige, Hyppolite strongly contributes to the 'indigenization' of Hegelian philosophy in France (Mudimbe and Bohm 1994) and had the merit of providing 'some presence to this great and slightly phantomlike shadow that was Hegel' (Foucault 1972: 235). Indeed, since the late 1940s, and for at least two decades until his death in 1968, Hyppolite played a major role in the French philosophical landscape exerting a long-lasting influence on a very promising generation of young philosophers (Bianco 2013). Amongst them Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, for whom *Logic and Existence* is the book that raised 'all the problems' that the next generations were now obliged to solve (Foucault 1994: 785).

In his reading of Hegel, Hyppolite significantly distances himself from Kojève's humanist interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that isolates it from the system and thus ends up turning Hegel's phenomenological journey into an 'absolute anthropology' where Absolute Knowing appears as a merely human achievement (Hyppolite 1991: 457). Instead, Hyppolite wants to avoid both theological and anthropological perspectives with the aim to restore Absolute Knowing to its original significance, namely 'the discovery of the speculative'. The appraisal of the speculative

value of such an 'absolute revelation' – 'a thought of Being that appears through man and history' – allows Hyppolite to embrace a hermeneutic path entirely different from the one proposed by Kojève (Hyppolite 1991: 241).

In his 1952 *Logic and Existence*, meditating on Hegel's grand *Logic*, that he considers as the sequel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely as the self-expression of Absolute Knowing in its logical moments, Hyppolite portrays the *Science of Logic* as an 'ontology of sense' – in his words 'the total Thought knowing itself only in its determinations' (1997: 194). Pace Marx, Feuerbach and Kojève, Hyppolite (1997: 180) argues that history cannot be imagined as the 'monumental genesis of man', just as the advent of Absolute Knowing cannot be mistaken for the emergence of man's self-consciousness. The advent of the Absolute rather designates an *adventure* of Being that 'finds expression and testament in man' and manifests itself through the medium of philosophical discourse (Hyppolite 1969: 170). Thus, if the *Logos* incarnates the movement of the self-positing of Being that happens in history – 'what Hegel calls the *concept*, which we can translate as *sense*' – Hegel's 'logic of philosophy' must indeed be understood as an 'absolute genesis of sense' (Hyppolite 1997: 161, 194).

Hyppolite and Kojève's interpretations also diverge as to their respective understanding of the relation that Hegel establishes between Being and Knowing. Hyppolite conceives such a nexus as one of *integral immanence* at odds with Kojève's 'dialectical dualism' (Jarczyk and Labarrière 1996: 65). For Hyppolite (1997: 176), in Hegel's thought 'immanence is complete' since sense results precisely from the immanent movement whereby Being posits itself as *Logos*. 'Hegelian philosophy', he writes, 'rejects any notion of transcendence; it is a rigorous philosophical attempt to remain on the ground of immanence and not leave it. There is no question of another world; there is no thing-in-itself, no transcendence. And yet finite human thought is not trapped in its own finitude; it surpasses itself and what it reveals or manifests is Being itself' (Hyppolite 1969: 170). Indeed, for Hyppolite immanence rhymes with transcendence. As he writes, 'All the *Phenomenology* appears as an heroic effort of reducing a vertical transcendence to a horizontal one' that keeps alive in itself the internal difference between sense and its negation (Hyppolite 1991: 240).

Hyppolite's hermeneutics thus relies on two complementary strategies aimed against all too humanist reductions of the Absolute to self-consciousness: the deanthropologization of Being and the immanentization of Sense. His anti-humanist penchant amounts neither to an ontological devaluation of human existence nor to dismissing historical experience. Human language is for him 'the dwelling of Being' as much as man is a 'crossroads' where the adventure of Being manifests itself (Hyppolite 1991: 157), and as in his view temporality is philosophy's element, he does not want to dispense with historicity either. Rather, he asks 'what happens to human history from the perspective of Absolute Knowing?' (Hyppolite 1991: 157). This is the question that arises when one refuses to pursue the first direction of Hegelianism – the one that leads to Marxist or Sartrean humanism – and recognizes that 'the Hegelian problem, which is our own, concerns *the relation between Truth and Existence*' (Hyppolite 1969: 167).

Following the Hegelian lesson, according to which 'Absolute is mediation', Hyppolite maintains that truth and history cannot be framed as separate, but must be conceived as related to each other through an internal difference, like the finite

and the infinite (1997: 61). It is indeed necessary, for Hegel as well as for Hyppolite, to twist thought to make this *immanent difference* thinkable. Yet, immanence per se is not the solution that can ensure a smooth synthesis of logic and existence: it is, for Hyppolite, only the appropriate medium where the problem of their mediation can be posed. If Hegel's Absolute allows him to conceive of an immanent Logos that, on the one hand, displays itself in history and, on the other hand, makes history intelligible via its logical determinations, such a speculative element does not come about without complications. As Hyppolite remarks, displaying his own metaphilosophical concerns, 'how a truth can be the work of men, raised at the very heart of existence through the mediation of existence which it simultaneously transcends?' (1969: 167).

In his review of *Logique et existence* Deleuze incisively summarizes Hyppolite's anti-Kojévian conclusions and aims as follows:

Absolute knowledge is not a human reflection, but a reflection of the Absolute in man. The Absolute is not a second world, and yet, absolute knowledge is actually distinguished from empirical knowledge just as philosophy is distinguished from all anthropology ... 'There is nothing to see behind the curtain' ... or, as Hyppolite says, 'the secret is that there is no secret' ... Absolute knowledge must simultaneously comprehend all empirical knowledge and comprehend nothing else, since there is nothing else to comprehend, and yet comprehend its radical difference from empirical knowledge.

(Deleuze 1997: 193)

For Deleuze, Hyppolite's main philosophical commitment – the attempt to conceive 'radical difference' within 'complete immanence', faces in the last instance some intrinsic difficulties (Hyppolite 1997: 59): 'if there is no second world, how can absolute knowledge still be distinguished from empirical knowledge? Do we not fall back into the simple anthropology that we had criticized?' (Deleuze 1997: 193). In fact, Hyppolite takes up the triple challenge of thinking of an 'absolute genesis of sense' that is nothing but *becoming* and envisioning a historical becoming which is different from the becoming of the Logic so as to avoid the risk of a return of anthropologism while, at the same time, maintaining that the becoming of the Absolute *does happen in history*. For him, this is actually the intricate question that has emerged with Hegel: given that 'the truth to which he [man] may aspire appears in and through that history, *how to ground human history and a possible truth, or reason, within the becoming of history so conceived?*' (Hyppolite 1969: 154; my emphasis).

Hyppolite's preoccupation manifestly resonates with Koyré's earlier aporetic dilemma. It is true that Hyppolite, unlike Kojève, never seriously takes into consideration the hypothesis of a closing of the system, since in his view Hegel's speculative circle is all but an enclosure of thought. However, the author of *Logique et existence* is deeply concerned with the apparently impossible performance of founding truth in history and linking Hegel's 'logic of philosophy' to its own apparition in time, precisely insofar as the *Science of Logic* cannot be reduced to a history of philosophy but rather epitomizes the eternal history of Being (Hyppolite 1997: 161).

Like Koyré, Hyppolite grasps the 'complementary and almost incompatible aspects of Hegel's philosophy', which he describes in all its contradictory ambivalence in the following terms:

1) It is a thought of history, of the concrete human adventure, and it has been constituted in order to give account of this experience; 2) It is an adventure of Being – Hegel speaks of the Absolute – and not simply of man – this is why it is a speculative adventure, Absolute Knowing, while it is also at the same time history, becoming and temporality; moreover, Absolute Knowing doesn't exist beyond this becoming ... but this becoming, in turn, is not a scattered series without a link, it is a teleology without precondition, an adventure of Sense.

(Hyppolite 1991: 335)

Hyppolite understands Hegel's endeavour as the effort to root the advent of the Absolute into history and to expose the *sense* of such an event. Indeed, sense *qua telos*, is for Hyppolite the ultimate concern of Hegel's logic, a logic that interprets the dialectic as a progressive and self-determining conquest of sense. Yet, in the very last pages of *Logique et existence* 'almost indepassable difficulties' come to the fore but remain unanswered (Hyppolite 1997: 186). If 'history is the place of passage from temporal objective spirit to absolute spirit and to the Logos' and of 'the appearance of the concept through which man has access to the eternal sense', this passage itself 'is not a historical fact', as Hyppolite highlights, and 'history does not produce the Logos, the self-knowledge of the Absolute, as we produce an effect according to a plan conceived in advance' (1997: 188–189). This is why the philosopher remarks that the 'passage from history to Absolute Knowledge, the passage from the temporal to the eternal, is Hegelianism's most obscure dialectical synthesis'. What is particularly hard to comprehend about it, is precisely the fact that 'history is self-creating, like the Logos, but this creation is there temporal, here eternal'. It remains, therefore, complicated to locate and circumscribe the becoming Absolute of history – or in Hyppolite's words, 'human consciousness's becoming Absolute Knowledge', the appearance of 'eternally actual truth' in time – in 'an epoch of world history' (1997: 188).

However, the transition from history to speculation is not univocal, and speculation actually undergoes an opposite transition, which may appear even more obscure than the one emphasized by Hyppolite, namely the *advent of the Absolute into history*. Hegel's philosophy illustrates, on the one hand, the sublation of history into the eternity of the Absolute – a transition from the historical to the logical – and, on the other hand, the sublation of Absolute Knowing into the course of history – a transition from the logical to the historical that necessarily entails two antinomic options: either the advent of the Absolute brings history to an end by – allegedly – sentencing philosophy to death, or history survives the appearance of the Absolute by – allegedly – undermining its very absoluteness. This latter transition echoes Kojève's well-known concern with history: how can history survive the event of the Absolute after having attained Absolute truth? The matter requires elucidating from the perspective of the Absolute as much as from that of history, to shed light on the *event of the Absolute* and on the *eventfulness* of such event, specifically, its meaning and historical scope.

Kojève, Hyppolite and the Gordian knot of Hegel's Absolute

At this point, one could venture to observe that while Hyppolite's 'complete immanence' proves to be unable to reconcile the 'radical difference' of logic and existence, remaining trapped in its 'horizontal transcendence' and torn by its dualism, Kojève's 'dualist ontology', whose foundation the philosopher considered as 'the principal philosophical task of the future', ends up disclosing an 'atheistic and finitist' understanding of human history, which is nonetheless conceived as the ground of the Absolute and the vessel of all ends (Kojève 1980: 215, 259). For Hyppolite, Hegel's *Logic* is the site where the articulation of the temporal and the atemporal displays itself in its most intricate shape. For Kojève, instead, the system exposed in the *Encyclopaedia*, as Hegel's last word at the end of history, announces a setback for philosophy and proclaims the impossibility of any further Discourse.

Although Kojève seems to find a consistent solution to the paradox formulated by Koyré, opting for Eternity at the expense of Time, his anthropological reading of the *Phenomenology* forces him to *mutilate* Hegel's philosophy by barring it from eternity and sentencing it to a *wise* future of perpetual silence (this would actually be Kojève's version of the *fin de l'histoire* taken at its face value, a version that has been countered earlier, playing Kojève against himself and his 'Freudian slips' about the end of philosophy). On the contrary, Hyppolite's apparently unsolvable concern with regards to 'the most obscure dialectical synthesis of Hegelianism' and his 'modest' interpretation of the issue provide precious insights for revealing the complex entanglements that underpin Hegel's Absolute.

If in Hyppolite's case inconsistency arises precisely from his attempt to give a speculative account of becoming from the perspective of the eternal Being *qua* eternal Truth, in Kojève's case consistency is granted by the abrupt interruption of history decreed by the coming full circle of the Concept. However, this assessment of the theoretical perspectives put forward by the two interpreters may also be reversed. One could actually highlight Kojève's manifest inconsistency resulting from his implausible effort to philosophically argue for the death of philosophy after the end of history and rather value Hyppolite's cautious account of Hegel's 'obscure dialectical synthesis' of logic and existence for eventually facilitating a consistent comprehension of this dense speculative Hegelian knot.

Metaphorically, it can be said that Kojève's approach consists in solving the knot by drastically cutting it, whereas Hyppolite's hermeneutics that scrutinizes it thoroughly, ends up making it even tighter. In any case, what is most remarkable is that both authors have been engaging exactly with the same 'metaphilosophical' trouble. Indeed, the pair 'Concept and Time' designates in Kojève's terms what the pair 'Logic and Existence' indicates *mutatis mutandis* in Hyppolite's words. On the one hand, Concept and Logic stand for the notion of philosophical Truth, on the other hand, Time and Existence stand for history. The two philosophers diverge in regards to their understanding of each term and pair.

For Kojève, Concept *is* Time and in the entire history of philosophy Hegel is the first to come up with the identification of Time and Concept. While Hyppolite (1997: 188) recognizes that "Time is the concept, but the concept in its immediate *Dasein*

because time is the extasis of difference, which in the Logos presents itself as the internal movement of determinations, temporality as eternal', for Kojève (1980: 101), who generalizes the *Phenomenology's* punctual reference to *der daseiende Begriff selbst* ('the Concept itself which exists empirically') to fit his formula, the Concept *as such* is nothing but Time. Additionally, Kojève states that 'The aim of Hegel's philosophy is to give account of the fact of History. From this, one might conclude that the Time that he identifies with the Concept is historical Time, the Time in which human history unfolds, or better still, the Time that realizes itself (not as the motion of the stars, for example, but) as universal History' (1980: 133). Contra Parmenides, for whom the Concept is immobile Eternity – but also contra Plato, Aristotle and Kant, for whom the Concept is eternal albeit related to 'something *other* than itself', namely Eternity or Time – according to Kojève (1980: 101), Hegel affirms the identity of *Begriff* and *Zeit*. Since the Discourse, in turn, coincides with the Concept that coincides with Time, the very existence of philosophy is conditioned by the temporality of the Concept. At the end of human history, the Concept, namely the Discourse of Hegel's philosophy, realizes the goal of its own completion, preventing any further development and only leaving room for silence.

Unlike Kojève, Hyppolite claims the non-identity of the notions of Logic and Existence in Hegel. At the same time – and this is where the knot tightens – Logic and Existence are not only closely related but also share identical traits in spite of being different. Both must be conceived as becoming; therefore, both are temporal and somehow rooted in history. The impasse that Hyppolite grasps results precisely from the intimate belonging of the two terms that does not allow one to think of them separately, but still does not facilitate the task of understanding their relation. If the Logic is temporal and 'temporality is the very eternity of the Concept' (Hyppolite 1969: 179), then logical time is not merely historical, rather it is the 'eternal history of Being' that cannot be mistaken for history as such. However, since the Logic is also eternal, as 'the absolute element of sense' (Hyppolite 1997: 158), how is 'the eternal future of Being which continuously becomes present' to be explained (Hyppolite 1969: 179)? Or how can the Logic be eternally achieved and still rooted in history and expanding through it?

Hyppolite remarks that the eternity of the *Logic* is actually *sui generis*. As he emphasizes, Hegel affirms that 'the logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought', but he also significantly adds that 'It *can therefore be said* that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit' (Hegel cited in Hyppolite 1997: 67). Indeed, the idea of a Logos preceding the existence of the world is nothing more than a *representation*: a fiction that has truth and validity from the limited standpoint of human understanding. Instead, Hyppolite argues, 'Hegel rediscovers the historical systems of the past in this logic of philosophy, he penetrates them not as personal worldviews, with the curiosity of historical contingencies, but as moments which are in themselves an organization, which have unveiled the Absolute *under a certain aspect*' (1997: 158–159). Even if the *Logic* presents itself through the unfolding of its categories as the 'ideal genesis' of sense, Hyppolite concludes that 'The Hegelian eternity is not an eternity before time, but the mediating thought which presupposes

itself absolutely in time' (1997: 188). For Hyppolite, the phenomenological trajectory of consciousness and Spirit facilitates Hegel's task of recoding human history into the Logos, insofar as it allows him to 'exhibit human consciousness's becoming-absolute-knowledge, as if this becoming were a history' (1997: 189). Conversely, the *Logic* conjures all the (allegedly) contradictory instances that permeate Hegel's thought whereby, in his own words, if 'Truth is eternal ... and has no history', at the same time, 'the sequence of the systems of Philosophy in History is identical to the sequence in the logical deduction of the conceptual determinations in the Idea' (VPG I, 24, 49; my translation). Indeed, while the *Phenomenology* allows Hegel to show the twofold dialectical process, both temporal and logical, that underlies the genesis of the Absolute, the *Logic* faces the harder challenge to integrate historicity – the series of the determinations as they appeared in time – within its own eternity – the logical successions of the categories.

Kojève, who also confronted the issue, formulates in his *Introduction* perplexities that echo the ones raised by Hyppolite:

Truth, in the strict sense of the term is supposed to be a thing that cannot be either modified or denied: it is, as we say, 'universally and necessarily' valid - i.e., it is not subject to changes, it is, as we also say, eternal or nontemporal. On the other hand, he adds, there is no doubt that it is found at a certain moment of time and that it exists in time, because it exists through and for Man who lives in the World.

(Kojève 1980: 100)

Kojève realizes that 'to pose the problem of truth, even partial truth, is necessarily to pose the problem of time, or more particularly, the problem of the relation between time and the eternal or between time and the intemporal' (1980: 100). However, Kojève, unlike Hyppolite and Koyré, firmly believes that 'this is the problem that Hegel poses and *resolves*' (1980: 100; my emphasis).

By flipping Hegel's logic, we encounter history as the other side of the coin: for Hyppolite, as for Hegel, history is a fully human matter, although man is not the goal of history, rather the Absolute is such a goal achieving itself in the 'errance of history', through man, via language (Hyppolite 1991: 309–310). In his view, history is not the *source* of the 'absolute genesis of sense' as exposed in the *Logic*, although there is no other realm behind the historical world from which sense could arise. History does not only host and partake in time to the achievement of the Absolute, but it is also meant to surpass and survive the manifestation of the Absolute to the point that 'Hegelian philosophy *falls back* into history and is itself explained historically' (Hyppolite 1969: 83). 'What deep relation can then exist between this conception [of the Absolute] and this new epoch of human history [in which the Absolute manifests itself]?' asks Hyppolite (1991: 339), pointing once again to the Gordian knot that haunts his late works on Hegel. Or, in other words, how can history survive Hegel's Absolute? And, in that case, what would the *absoluteness* of the Absolute consist of, if its accomplishment does not entail the impossibility of going *further* and thinking *otherwise*?

Surviving the Absolute

To unpack these questions, as Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite have done in different ways, and to reconnect to Ware's metaphilosophical speculations, requires an elucidation of the relationship between the *adventure* of the Absolute – its unfolding through time *qua* becoming across nature and spirit – and the very *advent* of the Absolute in history – the event of its manifestation through the Hegelian philosophy. From Hegel's standpoint, the latter could not happen at any time, but only at a certain degree of accomplishment of the *Geist* that coincides with his own age. Therefore, whilst the *advent* of the Absolute is premised on a given historical moment, its *adventure* logically encapsulates the historicity of its entire process.

Indeed, Hegel's Absolute participates in both eternity and temporality: it is eternal or, as Kojève said, it is 'Eternity engendered by Time', insofar as the momentous achievement of the Hegelian philosophy cannot be conceived as a temporary revocable outcome, but rather must be seen as the real and only path for self-conscious thinking to be pursued by all philosophies to come (Kojève 1980: 149). Simultaneously, as Hyppolite highlights, the Absolute is also temporal, insofar as it incorporates the 'eternal temporality of mediation' and time is preserved within it as historical becoming (Hyppolite 1969: 183; translation modified). Neither Hyppolite nor Kojève though, succeed in providing full consistency to Hegel's ambitious speculative wager that consists in conceiving of an Absolute being both *eternal and historical*. If Hyppolite interprets the issue as the 'most obscure dialectical synthesis' of Hegelianism, Kojève sheds light on its obscurity by sacrificing the temporal in the name of the eternal and proclaiming the end of history and philosophy. It is by dealing with such a dialectical puzzle that both Kojève and Hyppolite touch upon metaphilosophical questions without, however, framing the problem in actual metaphilosophical terms.

The metaphilosophical perspective adopted by Ware allows for a reconfiguration of the dilemma originally raised by Koyré as an *aut aut* between the infinity of history and philosophy, on the one hand, and the accomplishment of philosophy at the end of history in the shape of the Hegelian system, on the other hand. In Ware's view Hegel's philosophy is historical inasmuch as like every other philosophy, it is the philosophy of its own time imbued with the materials of its age and fuelled by its spirit. Yet, unlike other philosophies that do not necessarily elaborate on their own relationship with their age in a self-conscious manner, the Hegelian philosophy is fully conscious of its own speculative function. As he argues, the Absolute is nothing but 'absolute Self-consciousness' that represents, so to say, the speculative *surplusvalue* of Hegel's philosophy. Ware, in other words, does not see the necessity to ground the accomplishment of the system and the achievement of the Absolute on a philosophy of history that declares the end of time. Although he does not specifically engage with the conceptual relation of time and eternity, like Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite extensively did, Ware grants Hegel's philosophy the chance to be both historical and transhistorical. While being the self-conscious exposition of its time apprehended in thought, Hegel's philosophy also exhibits a transhistorical scope that goes well beyond the boundaries of its age and represents a universal gain for philosophy *tout*

court. Such a speculative gain consists precisely in staging the Absolute *qua* self-consciousness as the unsurpassable aim of speculation, which means reclaiming for every coming philosophy the task – both the right and the duty – of the *Darstellung* of the philosophical truth *for its time being*. The epoch-making elevation that Hegel's philosophy attains, from the particular and contingent moment of its appearance to the universal achievement of its speculative discovery, shows that the *advent* of the Absolute – a peak in its historical *adventure* that testifies to its absoluteness – perfectly incarnates the transition from the temporal to the eternal and back again, which allows us to positively answer the question of whether philosophy can survive – and actually survived – the very advent of Hegel's Absolute in history. Indeed, philosophy survives the advent of the Absolute in history, precisely because the speculative stake that has been raised by Hegel's Absolute by no means declares the end of history nor prevents future philosophies from the task of engaging with the conceptual comprehension of their own time.

To that extent, if Ware's metaphilosophical outlook does not allow for analytically grasping and digging into the different speculative paradoxes that Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite have been confronting with, it may help to retrospectively translate them into a slightly different reconfiguration in which their aporetic dimension withers away. From such a perspective, Hegel's dialectical synthesis of time and eternity – or in Koyré's terms the 'co-penetration of Time and Eternity' (Koyré 1971: 188) – marked by the advent of the Absolute in history, an Absolute that is both historical and capable of raising itself above history to proclaim its irrevocable speculative truth, does not amount to conflating the two terms, rather it makes merely conscious and conceivable their co-constitutive relation whereby eternity only emerges in and through time. For such a synthesis not to be thought of as a conceptual shortcut that is meant to untangle all the intricacies emerging at the intersection of the temporal and the eternal – or as the philosophical 'gunshot' for which Hegel shows much disdain in the *Phenomenology* – one must remember that any overcoming of the impasse originally framed by Koyré does not *solve* the speculative knot that had been tied by Hegel's Absolute, but rather calls for thinking Hegel's philosophy up to the entanglement of its intricate ties.

Notes

- 1 The first two main introductions to *Le Concept, le Temps, le Discours* – the 'Psychological Introduction of the Concept' and the 'Logical Introduction of Time' – are preceded by a first general 'Introduction to the System of Knowledge' that Kojève conceives as 'a brief commentary on the title of the whole of the present work' (2019: 28). This rather long general introduction is devoted to the illustration of the two fundamental pillars of Kojève's *Discourse*, the notions of *Concept* and *Time*. In turn, the general introduction is preceded by a preliminary introduction, the 'Attempt at an Updating of the Hegelian System of Knowledge' and the entire series of introductions by a preface opening the book. In the contorted structure of Kojève's outline of the System, a third main introduction, matches with the logical and psychological ones: this is the historical introduction to the *Système du Savoir*, which

is meant to progressively *introduce* – in the sense of ‘entering’ – *Time into the Concept and the Concept into Time* so as to show their final mutual identification. In spite of being unachieved, the historical introduction consists of four published books, three of which recount a ‘reasoned history of pagan philosophy’, while the fourth one is devoted to Kant. Additionally, the four volumes composing the (unaccomplished) historical introduction to the System are preceded by a general introduction, a preliminary introduction and a short preface.

- 2 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom’s translation.

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Rorty and Hegel: Towards a Metaphilosophical Pragmatism

Olivier Tinland

The importance of metaphilosophy in Rorty's philosophy

Richard Rorty's philosophical enterprise – this salient feature has been curiously neglected by many readers of his books and articles – may be characterized as involving a constant and almost obsessive attention to the *metaphilosophical* issues attached to the practice of philosophy.¹ As long as little account is taken of this attention and its methodological implications, the reading of his works and the understanding of his major claims are likely to be distorted, given that 'his philosophical views are generally adopted for metaphilosophical purposes' (Tartaglia 2007: 4). It is therefore crucial to take notice of the particular ways in which Rorty, throughout his career, has approached metaphilosophy to understand the splitting of his discourse into two (overlapping) levels: a *first (philosophical)* level dedicated to the elaboration of 'first-order' views concerning various topics (the Mind-Body Problem, the relations between representation and reality, truth and justification, irony and solidarity, etc.) and a *second (metaphilosophical)* level, by far the most important to him, which concerns the *self-image* of philosophical activity, the self-reflection on its status, its role and its relation to the whole history of human culture.

Let's start our investigation with factual remarks. The mere mention of the term 'philosophy' in many titles of Rorty's books and articles, while of course not in itself conclusive, is nevertheless a significant clue to his deep and pervasive metaphilosophical commitment. From his early writings² to his later works,³ Rorty's intellectual journey has been punctuated with numerous explicit reflections on metaphilosophical issues.

As I said, it is not enough to mention the numerous titles of the books and papers where Rorty explicitly uses the word 'philosophy': to make my point, I will need to go a bit deeper into Rorty's view of philosophy.⁴ But first, we have to keep in mind that such a focus on metaphilosophical problems is quite unusual in the context of analytic philosophy: a lot of philosophers have denied the relevance of metaphilosophy, arguing that the very idea of a meta-level of philosophical inquiry is either useless⁵ or misguided.⁶ Rorty does not share such an 'eliminativist' view of metaphilosophy: throughout his career, he constantly questioned the historical,

intellectual and linguistic conditions of the existence of philosophy as a special discipline, considered as an academic field (a '*Fach*', as he liked to say, to stress its socially and historically instituted dimension) more or less dependent on the rest of human culture. Philosophy distinctly refers to its official name in a constantly problematic and conflicting way, the definition and use of this name being the subject of endless debates. Where others consider such a self-reflection on the status of philosophy as a pointless scruple that would divert us from a direct engagement in the treatment of 'first-order' philosophical issues, the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* has always considered it justified, if not necessary, to devote quite a long time to this topic, emphasizing the eidetic instability of philosophical activity and the transitory nature of apparently perennial philosophical problems.⁷ However, as we shall see, such a detour by metaphilosophy has to be done in very peculiar ways, quite different from the traditional reflective questioning of philosophy on its own method and purpose: Rorty is always eager – and it is only an apparent paradox – to denounce the dogmatism and shallowness of traditional metaphilosophy, claiming that 'questions about "the method of philosophy" or about "the nature of philosophical problems" ... are likely to prove unprofitable' (Rorty 1992: 374). I shall come back later to this seemingly paradoxical stance.

Such an interest in metaphilosophy (understood in quite an unusual way) is the reason why Rorty was so impressed by Hegel in his early years (in particular by Hegel's *Phenomenology*, perhaps the only book of Hegel's he actually read),⁸ despite the huge – and obvious – differences between their respective views on philosophy. Rorty's training, during his years at the University of Chicago (1946–1951), was not a standard analytical one: under the influence of Richard McKeon and his fellow professors, the history of philosophy held an important place in the Department of Philosophy. The young Rorty was not an admirer of Russell and Carnap, but a passionate reader of 'synoptic narratives' dealing with the big trends of the history of philosophy: 'The philosophers who made the greatest impression on me during these years were Hegel and Whitehead. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas*, and Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* gave me a taste for ambitious, swooshy, *Geistesgeschichte* that I have never lost' (Rorty 2010: 5–6).

As we shall see, Rorty's metaphilosophy has always been, from the very beginning, a *historical*, if not a *historicist*, one: his favourite motto for describing it was Hegel's famous dictum (approximately quoted from the preface to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*) 'Philosophy is its time held in thought' (Rorty 2010: 14). Rorty not only parts with the philosophical tradition that merely dismisses any metaphilosophical inquiry but also with the *methodological* way of dealing with metaphilosophy:

If the preeminent figures in one's canon include Berkeley, Hume, Mill, and Frege, one will probably not be much interested in metaphilosophy. If they include Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, one probably will – not metaphilosophy in the form of methodology, the form it took in Husserl and in Russell, but rather in the form of a historical narrative which places the works of the philosophers within the historical development of the culture.

(Rorty 1991b: 21)

The alternative is thus not only between the acceptance and the rejection of metaphilosophy per se, but rather between subscribing to a methodological and an historical view of metaphilosophy. According to Rorty, being a 'Hegelian' means endorsing a historical approach of metaphilosophy. But why being a Hegelian? Why choosing history instead of method? Does being a 'Hegelian' really involve choosing between history and method?

What kind of metaphilosophy?

In a little-known, now almost forgotten, article entitled 'Recent Metaphilosophy' (Rorty 1961),⁹ the future author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* presents the metaphilosophical investigation in the form of a trilemma, with three incompatible options:

Metaphilosophy may be defined as the result of reflection upon the following inconsistent triad:

- (1) A game in which each player is at liberty to change the rules whenever he wishes can neither be won nor lost.
- (2) In philosophical controversy, the terms used to state criteria for the resolution of arguments mean different things to different philosophers; thus each side take the rules of the game of controversy in a sense which will guarantee its own success (thus, in effect, changing the rules).
- (3) Philosophical arguments are, in fact, won and lost, for some philosophical positions do, in fact, prove weaker than others.

(Rorty 1961: 299)

Faced with this metaphilosophical trilemma, Rorty sketches three possible strategies: (1) metaphilosophical *scepticism*, (2) metaphilosophical *realism*, and (3) metaphilosophical *pragmatism*. First, metaphilosophical *scepticism* consists in considering (3) as false (one cannot really 'lose' or 'win' a philosophical discussion) and in considering (2) as the crucial point (one can always change the rules of a philosophical game to ensure one's own 'success') to manage to account for (1). In its 'pessimistic' version, this form of scepticism leads to the discrediting of philosophy (because such an impromptu change in the rules of the game may seem arbitrary) and to prefer more reliable forms of intellectual activity (logic, mathematics, science, etc.). In its 'optimistic' version, it leads to the highlighting of the valuable by-products of such an inherently fraudulent activity (the 'vision' proposed by some philosophers when they change the rules of the game) and to see in it 'not a search for truth, but an occasion for inspiration' (Rorty 1961: 300).

On the other hand, metaphilosophical *realism* consists in considering (3) as true (a philosophical debate may indeed have a 'winner' and a 'loser'), which implies to consider (2) as a wrong view of philosophical argumentation (the redefinition of philosophical terminology is not arbitrary but subject to objective constraints such as the adequacy to 'something' external to it or the internal coherence of definitions and arguments).

Metaphilosophical realism may be divided into three main subcategories:

1. the realism of *common sense*, which extends from Aristotle to the philosophy of ordinary language and supposes to use an invariable referent (sensible reality for example) to define constraints of adequacy;
2. *historical* realism, which takes into account the historicity of common sense while assigning to the history of philosophy (or the history of science) the status of a constraint on the redefinition of the 'rules of the game' (here, adequacy is not to be thought of as finding a referent outside the philosophical discourse, but as taking account of the great theses or the main results of such a history);
3. *eschatological* realism, which 'puts the "something", which limits arbitrariness off at the indefinitely far away end of inquiry' (Rorty 1961: 301) and considers the historicity of common sense as the asymptotic convergence towards a point of ideal agreement that will be designated – e.g. by Peirce – as 'the real'.

Finally, metaphilosophical *pragmatism* consists in rejecting outright (1) and embracing the idea that 'philosophy is the greatest game of all precisely because it is the game of "changing the rules"' (Rorty 1961: 301). The philosophical game will then be very likely to result in a 'success' or a 'defeat', provided that it will depend on the formulation, at a higher level of metaphilosophical reflection, of 'rules in terms of which to judge changes of rules'. Metaphilosophical pragmatists thus invite us to 'make a virtue of necessity', that is, to substitute metaphilosophy for the old dominant denominations of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, the doctrine of values): as such, they are 'the metaphilosopher's metaphilosophers' (Rorty 1961: 301) in the sense that what was merely a subsidiary aspect of previous philosophical games (i.e. questioning the successive redefinitions of the meaning, status, function and purpose of philosophy) becomes for them the main topic of the philosophical inquiry. It is no longer a matter of knowing how to 'lose' or 'win' the game of philosophical discussion, nor a matter of simply changing the rules of the game, but a matter of highlighting the various strategies and implications of the successive redefinitions of the philosophical game that are at work in such discussions. Therefore, the primary function of philosophy understood in this way will not be to reach the truth (by means of the criteria of adequacy, coherence or intersubjective convergence of beliefs) or agreement (by a thorough confrontation of theses and arguments), but to 'make possible communication', no longer between different kinds of non-philosophers ('the man in the street', scientists, politicians, poets), or even between competing philosophers (metaphysicians, theorists of knowledge or values), but between the metaphilosophers themselves. Taken in this radicalized self-reflective sense, the task of metaphilosophy will be to develop an 'ethics of controversy: a set of rules about how to set up rules' (Rorty 1961: 302).

Metaphilosophical pragmatism vs metaphilosophical realism

Applying this early typology of metaphilosophy to Rorty's own thought, it seems quite easy to see what his own view of metaphilosophy may be: indeed, what is depicted by him as 'metaphilosophical pragmatism' looks very much like what will be later labelled as

'epistemological behaviorism' (Rorty 1979), 'pragmatism' (Rorty 1982), 'ironism' (Rorty 1989) or 'cultural politics' (Rorty 2007a), that is, a sense of the inevitable contingency of the successive philosophical redescription of the world (as well as philosophy itself) linked to a strong ('romantic') emphasis on metaphilosophical creativity. It seems also quite easy to situate Hegel's metaphilosophy on this metaphilosophical map, according to the common view expressed by most Hegel scholars: it is to be found in the 'metaphilosophical realism' section and may be seen as a subtle combination of (1) 'historical realism' and (2) 'eschatological realism'.¹⁰ According to Hegel, (1) the dialectical process of the history of philosophy serves as an internal 'constraint' on the 'changes of the rules of the game' (for instance, the way Spinoza or Leibniz have changed the way of showing the epistemological and metaphysical implications of the concept of substance is strongly connected to the historical background of modern 'metaphysics', in particular to the Cartesian redescription of the Aristotelian and medieval concept of substance) and (2) such a process is a teleological one, leading to the 'true' philosophy, in which all the principles of the previous philosophical doctrines are 'sublated' into a single and final system (see EL, §14).¹¹

It seems, then, that Rorty's 'metaphilosophical pragmatism' is at odds with Hegel's 'metaphilosophical realism': the first option (pragmatism) is precisely designed to consider the so-called constraints of the second option (metaphilosophical realism) as merely optional, contingent, doomed to be outdated and replaced by new (optional, contingent) 'rules of the game'. Seen from Rorty's early perspective on metaphilosophy, Hegel's view of philosophy is insufficiently self-reflective: it is only 'first-order' metaphilosophy, claiming to unveil the eternal nature of the 'game' of philosophical activity through the historical manifestation of its dialectical 'change of rules', not a 'metaphilosophy's metaphilosophy' making explicit the impossibility of 'sublating' the historical 'changes of rules' into a single and final system.

It is then quite surprising to see that Rorty, from the very beginning, considers Hegel not as an obvious representative of an outdated view of philosophy, but rather, as an ally in his fight against all forms of philosophical realism. Criticizing the 'horrible examples' of philosophers who 'think of philosophy as a finite task – something which might get done, and done right, once and for all' and 'attempt to think of rules and rule-governed behavior as local, epiphenomenal features of the subject-matter at hand (and thus capable either of being reduced away, or of simply being shoved aside as unimportant)', Rorty sees Hegel as an 'honorable exception' to this 'natural and predictable move for philosophers to make' (Rorty 2010: 54). Furthermore, he thinks that the author of the *Phenomenology* contributes to the 'understanding of what rules are' (Rorty 2010: 53) and may be seen, as such, as a venerable forerunner of the later Wittgenstein. In the same way, Hegel is assumed to help us to understand that adopting a 'new set of categories' does not depend on external constraints: insofar as he has 'turn[ed] away from the attempt to find criteria for the success of the dialectical process *outside* of that realm' and realized that 'the progress of dialectical controversy cannot be judged from a standpoint outside that controversy itself', he has paved the way for the contemporary 'thesis that language cannot be transcended' (Rorty 2010: 60). To achieve metaphilosophical pragmatism, one has to 'strip Hegel's theory of philosophic method of the pretense of being a conclusion drawn from a set of (rather dubious) metaphysical premises' to 'reveal it as a practical solution to a practical problem':

The Problem is: how can we maintain a philosophic thesis about the ultimacy of some given set of categories without falling into the dilemma of self-referential inconsistency on the one hand and circularity on the other? The answer is: by recognizing that to propose a set of categories is not to offer a description of a nonlinguistic fact, but to offer a tool for getting a job done. The cash-value of the claim that a given category is ultimate thus becomes, simply, the claim that a language built around a given set of primitive predicates will work better than the other.

(Rorty 2010: 61)

Instead of being included in the 'epistemological' tradition (from Aristotle to Kant), caught in the 'dialectical circle involved in grounding one's metaphilosophy upon one's epistemology' (Rorty 2010: 61) and thereby missing the metaphilosophical pragmatist point, Hegelianism is cut off from its 'metaphysical premises' so as to be integrated into another philosophical tradition, the one that leads to the 'linguistic turn' ('language cannot be transcended') and the 'pragmatist turn' ('metaphilosophical problems are posed in [a] purely practical context'). As Rorty notices, 'the first self-conscious recognition of the dependence of criteriology upon ethical norms is found in Hegel' (2010: 50, n. 11): despite the metaphysical appearances of his speculative idealism, he seems to have managed to free himself from the tradition of 'philosophy as epistemology' (Rorty 1979) so as to emphasize the primacy of practical issues over the search of theoretical criteria of truth. Contrary to what has been suggested earlier, Hegel's metaphilosophy is thus not to be included in the 'metaphilosophical realism' section, but may be described as a kind of metaphilosophical 'proto-pragmatism' (Rorty 1998: 233) offering a way out of the dead ends of modern epistemology.

Hegelianism as metaphilosophical 'proto-pragmatism'

According to Rorty, Dewey was the first to see Hegelian philosophy as a 'proto-pragmatic view of inquiry', as opposed to Kant's 'pre-pragmatic' view of knowledge (Rorty 1998: 302). In fact, Dewey did a lot to incorporate his 'permanent Hegelian deposit' (Dewey 1984: 154) into his own pragmatic philosophy through various strategies of 'reconstruction' of Hegel's logic and theory of spirit. Hence the ambivalent portrait of Dewey sketched by Rorty when he interprets his thought in the light of this Hegelian legacy.¹² Deweyan instrumentalism is a crucial step towards a pragmatic reading of Hegel's philosophy: indeed, several Hegelian moves may be included in pragmatism, such as (1) the overcoming of abstract dualisms, in particular the one between nature and spirit,¹³ (2) the primacy of the quest for freedom over theoretical interests,¹⁴ (3) the integration of rational activity into a progressive historical process of cultural achievement,¹⁵ (4) the inclusion of the individual moral consciousness into an historical and social environment,¹⁶ (5) a view of philosophy as responding to the needs and interests of its time,¹⁷ and (6) a relational, holistic and processual conception of experience (Rorty 1998: 294–298). However, according to Rorty, one has to distinguish

between the good and the bad influences of Hegel on Dewey: the Hegelian moves (1–5) are obviously very good ones and actually inspired Dewey's most ambitious genealogical narratives such as *The Quest for Certainty*. On the contrary, move (6), in spite of appearances, is a dangerous one, since (according to Rorty) it may lead to the relapse of metaphilosophical pragmatism into an anachronistic 'quasi-Bergsonian' metaphysics of experience, as we can see in *Experience and Nature*. It seems that Dewey was mistaken in attempting the impossible synthesis of Hegel's historicist narrative and Locke's genetic and empiricist theory of experience. He 'wanted to be as naturalist as Locke and as historicist as Hegel' (Rorty 1982: 82), yet

no man can serve both Locke and Hegel. Nobody can claim to offer an 'empirical' account of something called 'the inclusive integrity of experience' nor take this 'integrated unity as the starting point for philosophic thought' if he also agrees with Hegel that the starting point of philosophic thought is bound to be the dialectical situation in which one finds oneself caught in one's own historical period – the problems of the men of one's time.

(Rorty 1982: 81)

This chimerical synthesis of historicist idealism and naturalistic empiricism sometimes takes the somewhat aberrant form of a 'naturalistic metaphysics' (Rorty 1982: 81) or a 'metaphysics of experience' (Rorty 1982: 77) unwisely flirting with panpsychism (Rorty 1998: 292). Even if the well-understood Deweyan project is actually much more, according to Rorty, a 'therapeutic treatment of the tradition' (Rorty 1982: 77) aiming at dissolving the false problems regarding the conceptualization of experience, the fact remains that this approach is still burdened with ambivalences that are harmful to metaphilosophical pragmatism. The result is a typically metaphysical temptation to characterize the experience as it is 'in itself', to get rid of any cultural and historical contextualization of such a characterization, and thus of any concern to keep in mind the historical contingency of the meta-vocabulary underlying this account. In other words, inheriting Hegel's move (1), 'Dewey confuses two ways of revolting against philosophical dualisms' (Rorty 1982: 82), one that inclines him to the historicist deconstruction of these dualisms (which is very close to the 'metaphilosophical pragmatism' Rorty himself advocates), the other that directs him towards a non-dualistic metaphysics of nature (which is closer to the 'metaphilosophical realism' Rorty constantly criticizes). The genealogical and therapeutic metadiscourse on the discussions about experience and nature (which is favoured by Rorty) is then in danger of degenerating into a mere dogmatic 'first-order' discourse on experience and nature, lying on the same level as the metaphysical dualisms he intends to fight. By contrast, other 'Hegelians' such as Sellars and Brandom allow us to get rid of such a temptation, providing an up-to-date version of Hegel's philosophy of Spirit:

They offer us a linguistified version of Hegel, one in which changes in vocabulary and in inferential relationships between sentences constitute the growth of Spirit's self-consciousness. They abandon Dewey's attempt to bring 'experience and nature' together in a vaguely biologicistic, quasi-Bergsonian, way in favor of an attempt to

show how linguistic behavior can be seen bifocally, either as nature or as spirit – either as causal interaction or as conformity to social norms.

(Rorty 2007b: 39)

Here, the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* surprisingly decides to play Hegel *against* Dewey, at least *a certain* Hegel, not the one Dewey, according to Rorty, is sometimes tempted to favour (the idealistic Hegel who overcomes the metaphysical dualisms of the understanding in a monistic, 'quasi-Bergsonian', view of experience), but a radically historicist, contextualist, evolutionist, 'Herderian Hegel' (Rorty 2007b: 37). The historicist Hegel belongs to the superior caste of the 'strong philosophers ... who are interested in dissolving inherited problems rather than in solving them' (Rorty 1989: 20), operating the 'detranscendentalization' of the Kantian subject by immersing it in the historicity and the sociality of the operations of the mind: 'By being "Hegelian" I mean here treating the cultural developments which Kant thought it was the task of philosophy to preserve and protect as simply temporary stopping-places for the World-Spirit' (Rorty 1982: 85). Where Kant (and his contemporary followers) illegitimately absolutized the provisional standards of Newtonian scientific knowledge, the pietistic moral consciousness and the judgement of taste celebrated by the bourgeois *Aufklärung*, improperly transcendentalizing as 'a priori forms' what was only the historical deposit of a momentary self-understanding of European culture (Rorty 1982: 85–86), Hegel makes it possible to go the other way by endorsing the historicist (or 'Kuhnian') dimension of philosophy, as the famous dictum of the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* testifies: 'Philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts' (Rorty 1982: xl; see PR, 15).¹⁸ According to Rorty, such a 'temporalization of rationality' is 'the single most important step in arriving at the pragmatist's distrust of Philosophy' (1982: xli).¹⁹ If Hegel can be successfully 'domesticated' by playing his historicism ('philosophy') against his idealism ('Philosophy'), it is not absurd to see him as the great ancestor of pragmatism, the one who teaches the meta-narrative art of getting rid of the 'Platonic' conception of Knowledge (which relates the norms of the human community to a nonhuman transcendence, whether natural or supernatural) and the temptation to absolutize a view of reality as the unveiling of experience 'in itself', as it is (supposedly) 'given' to us.

Hegelianism as metaphilosophical 'ironism'

Rorty's critical assessment of Dewey's metaphysics rests on an original interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of philosophy, which is not to be found in Dewey's writings. Hegel may be presented as a 'proto-pragmatist' insofar as he is, more deeply, a 'proto-ironist' (Renault 2019). According to Rorty, an ironist is someone fully aware of the contingency of language and the radical historicity of 'final vocabularies':²⁰

I shall define an 'ironist' as someone who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she

has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old. (Rorty 1989: 73)

The ironist, defined as 'a nominalist and a historicist', is opposed both to (1) common sense and (2) the 'metaphysician' insofar as (1) 'to be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies' (Rorty 1989: 74) and (2) 'metaphysicians believe that there are, out there in the world, real essences which it is our duty to discover and which are disposed to assist their own discovery'. On the contrary, the ironic stance is 'meta-stable': ironists are 'never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves' (Rorty 1989: 74).

Again, it may seem at first sight quite difficult to associate Hegel with this ironic metaphilosophical view, for his basic metaphilosophical commitment is precisely that philosophy is a conceptual activity, where concepts are to be understood not merely as contingent linguistic tools of a finite subject, but as the subjective face of the intrinsic rationality of the world.²¹ The vocabulary of Hegel's *Logic* is 'final' not in the deflationist sense of a mere factual bound, but in the speculative sense of the (onto-)logical determination of philosophical discourse: it is made of 'objective thoughts' constituting 'the core of the world' (EL, §24, A1). In other words, Hegel's idealism may be described as a sophisticated form of conceptual realism.²² It is then quite surprising to see Rorty depicting Hegel as the first champion of the historicist-nominalist tradition: 'ever since Hegel, historicists thinkers ... have denied that there is such a thing as "human nature" or the "deepest level of the self"'. Their strategy has been to insist that socialization, and thus historical circumstance, goes all the way down – that there is nothing "beneath" socialization or prior to history which is definitory of the human' (Rorty 1989: xiii). Such a bold reading of Hegel²³ requires some implicit hermeneutic assumptions: (1) drawing a stark contrast between Kant and Hegel; (2) drawing a stark contrast between the 'young' Hegel (the 'ironist' author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) and the 'old' Hegel (the 'metaphysician' author of the *Science of Logic*); (3) playing the 'young' Hegel against the 'old' one to know 'what is living and what is dead' (Croce) of his philosophy and to suggest a non-metaphysical reading of it; (4) interpreting Hegel's *Phenomenology* as an historicist meta-narrative of occidental culture; and (5) interpreting Hegel's dialectics as the first, though still imperfect and ambivalent, attempt to replace theory with narrative and to think of self-consciousness as a kind of self-creation. Let's take a closer look at these assumptions.

Drawing a stark contrast between Kant and Hegel

According to Rorty, the transition from Kant to Hegel is a crucial step in the history of modern philosophy. Whereas Kantian criticism symbolizes the attempt to secure knowledge by unveiling its *a priori* conditions of possibility, Hegel initiates the 'narrative turn' from traditional metaphysics to irony: 'I think of Hegel's *Phenomenology* both as the beginning of the end of the Plato-Kant tradition and as a paradigm of the ironist's ability to exploit the possibilities of massive redescription' (Rorty 1989: 78).²⁴ Seen with Rorty's glasses, Hegel is not a 'systematic philosopher' striving to secure the existing vocabulary of modern thought, but an 'edifying philosopher'²⁵ highlighting the Heraclitean historicity of every conceptual scheme: the 'movement from Kant to Hegel' is thus 'the movement that leads from the thought that all human beings will always be hard-wired with the same conceptual repertoire to the thought that concepts are born and die in the course of history' (Rorty 2006: 76).

Drawing a stark contrast between the 'young' and 'old' Hegel

As has been pointed out (Renault 2019), Rorty's contrast between a 'young' and an 'old' Hegel is typically a 'Young Hegelian' move. Just as Engels, in his *Feuerbach and the End of German Philosophy*, famously contrasted the 'revolutionary' character of Hegel's dialectical method with the 'conservative' character of his political philosophy, Rorty sees Hegel's system as a betrayal of his younger self, that is, as an unfortunate relapse into metaphysics:

The older Hegel thought of 'philosophy' as a discipline which, because cognitive in a way that art was not, took precedence over art. Indeed, he thought that this discipline, now that it had attained maturity in the form of his own Absolute Idealism, could and would make art as obsolete as it made religion. But, ironically and dialectically enough, what Hegel actually did, by founding an ironist tradition within philosophy, was help de-cognitimize, de-metaphysize philosophy. He helped turn it into a literary genre. The young Hegel's practice undermined the possibility of the sort of convergence to truth about which the older Hegel theorized.

(Rorty 1989: 79)

In other words, to use Rorty's classification, Hegel's early 'metaphilosophical proto-pragmatism' may be seen as undermining his late 'metaphilosophical (historical and eschatological) realism'.

Playing the 'young' Hegel against the 'old'

Such a contrast between the 'old' and the 'young' Hegel is the key move to initiate a non-metaphysical reading of Hegelian philosophy:

If Hegel is read not as a metaphysician who says that reality is spiritual in nature, but instead as a naturalistic historicist who says that the test of a knowledge claim

or a cultural institution is its social utility rather than its correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality, then his work can be seen as a turning point in the history of philosophy ... If we learn to read Hegel in his nonmetaphysical, quasi-pragmatist way, he may have a lot to teach us.

(Rorty 2006: 92)

Here, one has to choose between the picture of Hegel inherited from British Idealism and Josiah Royce (which became the perfect 'strawman' for every 'refutation of idealism' all along the twentieth century) and the one inherited from Dewey (despite his own tendency to remain under the influence of the former picture): if Hegel's Absolute idealism is 'what is dead' of his philosophy, one has to turn to the second (historicist and naturalist) picture to see him not only as the end of the history of metaphysics but also as the beginning of something else – namely, the progressive replacement of 'theory' by 'ironism'. The relevant historical sequence to make the best use of Hegel is not the one going from Plato's *Parmenides* to the *Science of Logic*, but the one going from the *Phenomenology* to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida's *Post Card* (see Rorty 1989: ch. 5).

Interpreting Hegel's *Phenomenology* as an historicist meta-narrative of occidental culture

What, then, makes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* so special compared to Hegel's later works? After all, the *Phenomenology* doesn't end with the ironic stance of the 'beautiful soul', but with the speculative stance of 'absolute knowledge', so it isn't obvious at all that there is such a strong metaphilosophical difference between Hegel's first masterpiece and his later works. According to Rorty, the originality of the *Phenomenology* does not lie in the dogmatic claims Hegel makes, but in the *narrative form* of his writing: 'It seems to me that in the *Phenomenology*, and in Hegel's early writings, there is a kind of philosophical writing that is narrative in form; it is basically a story about the history of human nature' (Rorty 2006: 42).²⁶ The author of the *Phenomenology* is thus seen as a true *narrator*: instead of building a system, he tells us a story about a consciousness trying to overcome the contradictions of successive forms of life all along the history of the European world. Every *Gestalt* of consciousness is a new redescription of the norms governing European culture, which arises from the 'dialectical' conflict between various vocabularies.²⁷ The Hegelian dialectical method is not a mere tool used to reach an eternal truth, as in Plato's dialogues, but a new kind of *criticism* that allows the removal of past 'platitudes':

I have defined 'dialectic' as the attempt to play off vocabularies against one another, rather than merely to infer propositions from one another, and thus the partial substitution of redescription for inference ... In this view, Hegel's so-called dialectical method is not an argumentative procedure or a way of unifying subject and object, but simply a literary skill – skill at producing surprising gestalt switches by making smooth, rapid transitions from one terminology to another. Instead of keeping the old platitudes and making distinctions to help them cohere,

Hegel constantly changed the vocabulary in which the old platitudes had been stated; instead of constructing philosophical theories and arguing for them, he avoided argument by constantly shifting vocabularies, thereby changing the subject. In practice, though not in theory, he dropped the idea of getting at the truth in favor of the idea of making things new. His criticism of his predecessors was not that their propositions were false but that their languages were obsolete. By inventing this sort of criticism, the younger Hegel broke away from the Plato-Kant sequence and began a tradition of ironist philosophy which is continued in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

(Rorty 1989: 78)

Interpreting Hegel's dialectics as the first attempt to replace theory with narrative

However, the 'young' Hegel is only the first step in a larger sequence leading to the complete achievement of ironism. As such, his thought is still burdened with the temptation to remain a *theorist*, that is, to identify his own achievement with something bigger than him:

Europe, Spirit, and Being are not just accumulations of contingencies, products of chance encounters – the sort of thing Proust knew himself to be. This invention of a larger-than-self hero, in terms of whose career they define the point of their own, is what sets Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger apart from Proust and makes them *theorists* rather than novelists: people who are looking at something large, rather than constructing something small. Although they are genuine ironists, not metaphysicians, these three writers are not yet full-fledged nominalists, because they are not content to arrange little things. They also want to describe a big thing.

(Rorty 1989: 100)

As an 'ironist theorist', Hegel remains a *contradictio in adjecto*, undermining his own speculative theory by embracing the 'narrative turn' while undermining his own inchoative ironism by remaining faithful to the self-image of philosophy as an objective and (truly) final explanation of the world. Hence the 'meta-stable' character of his philosophical stance: with the famous thesis of the 'end of history', he was the first to raise the very problem he faced, the problem of the end of his own story. It is the problem of the self-consistency of a philosophy aiming at achieving a speculative task (reaching absolute knowledge) while contributing to destroy the very conditions of such an achievement (thinking the philosopher's own historical and cultural finitude):

The question 'Why should I think, how can I possibly claim, that redescription ends with me?' can also be thought of as the question 'How can I end my book?' The *Phenomenology of Spirit* ends on an ambiguous note: its last lines can be interpreted either as opening up to an indefinitely long future or as looking back on a story that is completed. But, notoriously, the note on which some of Hegel's later books end is 'And so Germany became Top Nation, and History came to

an End.' Kierkegaard said that if Hegel had prefaced the *Science of Logic* with 'This is all just a thought-experiment', he would have been the greatest thinker who ever lived. Striking that note would have demonstrated Hegel's grasp of his own finitude, as well as of everybody else's. It would have privatized Hegel's attempt at autonomy, and repudiated the temptation to think that he had affiliated himself with something larger ... The problem of how to finitize while exhibiting a knowledge of one's own finitude – of satisfying Kierkegaard's demand on Hegel – is the problem of ironist theory. It is the problem of how to overcome authority without claiming authority.

(Rorty 1989: 104)

It is now possible to understand what is behind the reading of Hegel as a 'proto-pragmatist': such a picture of Hegel's philosophy (and metaphilosophy) is only possible (and plausible) under the assumption that there are two sides in it, the 'idealist' side of the 'old' Hegel and the 'ironic' side of the 'young' one. From this point of view, Hegel's pragmatism is intelligible only as a *consequence* of his ironism: to consider Hegelianism as a kind of metaphilosophical pragmatism, one has to know 'what is living and what is dead' of Hegel's philosophy in order to play the lively (still relevant) part against the dead (outdated) one.

Is Rorty's Hegel still Hegelian?

Seen as a 'proto-pragmatist' and a 'proto-ironist', Rorty's Hegel may be plausibly considered as a venerable ancestor of metaphilosophical pragmatism. However, one might wonder whether such a portrayal of Hegel is still ... Hegelian. By splitting the Hegelian thought into two irreconcilable parts, the one desperately idealist (the 'old' or 'Roycean' Hegel), the other promisingly historicist (the 'young' or 'Herderian' Hegel), Rorty chooses to deprive himself of some core claims of Hegelianism (dialectics as a logical method involving 'objective thoughts', absolute spirit as a way of making explicit the universal conceptual structure of the world, history as a wholly rational and progressive process, etc.), keeping only the peripheral ones. However, one may ask if such a 'Hegelianism', once deprived of its core claims, still has anything to do with the most significant features of Hegel's philosophy. As long as it is identified with an historicist, quasi-Heraclitean, mobilism of the *Weltanschauungen*, this philosophy becomes almost indiscernible from other competing kinds of historicism.²⁸ Rorty's Hegelianism is a Kuhnian-style Hegelianism, the virtuous narrative of the successive shifts of the great paradigms of modern culture, and one can legitimately wonder whether this narrative should not do without any reference to Hegel himself, insofar as what is characteristic of the Hegelian 'great narrative' is its integration into a strong conception of *rationality* that is certainly historicized (Hegel's *Geist* is indeed not ahistorical and philosophy itself is made explicit through a history of philosophy) but not *reducible* to the context of a given historical time (reason *in* history, once it has fully developed into Hegel's 'system of science', is also the reason *of* history). Despite

what Rorty suggests, Hegel's metaphilosophy is not merely an historicist one: it is an historicized, dialectically self-reflective, rationalism, not a self-undermining historicist relativism of rational norms.²⁹

In other words, Rorty pictures Hegel as doing the opposite of what he actually does: where Hegel 'apprehends his time in thought', and thus *rationalizes* history (averting, or at least trying to avert the self-referential threat of historicist relativism about the supposed universal validity of his own thinking), Hegel rediscrined by Rorty 'apprehends thought in its time', and thus *historicizes* reason (undermining the basis of all speculative rationalism).³⁰ The split of the Hegelian system into an attractive 'pro-pragmatist' historicism and an unattractive speculative idealism produces in Rorty's thought only an *abstract dualism* contrasting a broadly defined contextualism (torn between the naturalistic model of Darwinian evolutionism and the sociological model of Kuhnian history of science) with a speculative absolutism, considered without further examination as outdated.³¹ Hegelianism is, as it were, 'emptied' at the very moment when it is 'updated', becoming no more than Rorty's name for the ultimate anti-metaphysical purification of Deweyan pragmatism. As we can see in his paper 'Dewey's Metaphysics' (Rorty 1982), Rorty uses Hegel as a kind of philosophical tool to turn contemporary pragmatism towards an anti-epistemological conception of rationality and to set aside the naturalist realism still alive in thinkers he admires, such as Dewey, Quine and Sellars, in favour of a fully historical, social and linguistic view of normativity.

It must also be pointed out that such a 'sociality of reason' (Pinkard 1994) remains quite indeterminate in Rorty's account: it may seem quite paradoxical to see Hegel as the champion of the 'detranscendentalization' of the Kantian subject while giving a sketch of his social and historical contextualism that couldn't be more abstract and idealized. Pace Rorty, a Hegelian *Volksgeist* is not a mere language game (and the same is also true of Kuhn's paradigms): it is full of social institutions, religious beliefs, moral obligations, economic practices, cultural achievements and material constraints. Torn between the Darwinian model of the random natural evolution of human cultures and the romantic model of the autonomous dynamic of human language, Rorty's understanding of philosophy as 'time held in thought' seems to fail to take into account the complexity and the 'robustness' of a social form of life: it is not the simple transitory product of an abstract history of our normative commitments, but an institutionalized 'second nature', deeply embedded in a material, social and political background (PR, §4). It is indeed quite ironic that, while trying to provide a more 'concrete' account of Hegelianism, Rorty eventually settled for a wholly abstract view of his philosophy of culture and history.³²

If Hegel – or at least Rorty's fictional Hegel – is saved from the downfall of modern philosophy (masterfully diagnosed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*), if he becomes unambiguously the 'great foe of immediacy' (Sellars 1997: 14) *par excellence*, the price to pay is such a dramatic weakening of his thought (especially his ambitious articulation of 'objective spirit' and 'absolute spirit') that one is entitled to wonder what remains of the Hegelian idea of a 'temporalization of reason' in such a distorted and abstract portrait of the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Of the 'great Hegelian serpent' (Sellars 1997: 79), all that is left, as it were, is the slough.

Notes

- 1 I don't mean to suggest here that Rorty's metaphilosophical commitments have been neglected as such. What I mean is that the unusual strength of such commitments as well as their deep consequences on Rorty's view of his own philosophical undertaking have been largely overlooked.
- 2 Including articles such as 'The Philosopher as Expert' (Rorty 2009) and 'Recent Metaphilosophy' (Rorty 1961).
- 3 See, in particular, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (Rorty 2007a), as well as the lectures *Philosophy as Poetry* (Rorty 2016), the preface ('Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy') and the two postscripts of *The Linguistic Turn* (Rorty 1992), his masterpiece *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1979), the introduction ('Pragmatism and Philosophy') and some chapters of *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Rorty 1982), several articles from the first two volumes (Rorty 1991a, 1991b) of the *Collected Papers*, the third part ('The Role of Philosophy in Human Progress') of *Truth and Progress* (Rorty 1998) and *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Rorty 1999).
- 4 For a more detailed account, see Tinland (2017). On Rorty's early interest in metaphilosophy, see the introduction by Steven Leach and James Tartaglia in Rorty (2014).
- 5 See, for instance, Popper (1968: 66): 'I believe that the function of a scientist or of a philosopher is to solve scientific or philosophical problems, rather than to talk about what he or other philosophers are doing or might do. Any unsuccessful attempt to solve a scientific or philosophical problem, if it is an honest and devoted attempt, appears to me more significant than a discussion of such a question as "What is science?" or "What is philosophy?"' See also Ryle (2009: 331): 'Preoccupation with questions about methods tends to distract us from prosecuting the methods themselves. We run, as a rule, worse, not better, if we think a lot about our feet.'
- 6 See Wittgenstein (1953: §121): 'One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word "philosophy" there must be a second-order philosophy. But it is not so: it is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word "orthography" among others without then being second-order.' See also Williamson (2007: ix): 'I ... rejected the word "metaphilosophy". The philosophy of philosophy is automatically part of philosophy, just as the philosophy of anything else is, whereas metaphilosophy sounds as though it might try to look down on philosophy from above, or beyond.'
- 7 See Rorty (2010: 15–16): 'Philosophy students who eschew historical study and metaphilosophical reflection are, I think, dooming themselves to become specialists on the ephemeral problems that their teachers happened to be writing about when they were in graduate school. This often leaves them wondering, in their later years, why nobody is any longer interested in the topics to which they have devoted most of their careers. There is, of course, no sure way for an enthusiastic young philosopher to avoid side-tracked by short-lived academic fashions. But metaphilosophy and historical study help.'
- 8 See Rorty (1999: 11): 'My starting point was the discovery of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book which I read as saying: granted that philosophy is just a matter of out-redescribing the last philosopher, the cunning of reason can make use even of this sort of competition. It can use to weave the conceptual fabric of a freer, better, more just society. If philosophy can be, at best, only what Hegel called "its time held in thought", still, that might be enough.' See also Rorty (1995b: 122): 'In writing about

- [the history of modern philosophy], I have never been happy with what I have said about Hegel. Much of Hegel remains mysterious to me. In particular, I cannot read *The Science of Logic* with interest, or pleasure, or understanding, to the end.'
- 9 Surprisingly, it has not been reproduced in the collection of Rorty's (2014) early papers.
 - 10 Rorty himself (1989: 67) is sometimes tempted to associate Hegel with this kind of eschatological realism: 'Habermas wants to preserve the traditional story (common to Hegel and to Peirce) of asymptotic approach to *foci imaginarii*. I want to replace this with a story of increasing willingness to live with plurality and to stop asking for universal validity.' However, as we shall see, Rorty speaks here of the 'old' Hegel, not of the 'young' author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
 - 11 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
 - 12 On Rorty's understanding of the ambivalent relationship between Hegel and Dewey, see Renault (2019).
 - 13 See Dewey (1984: 15): 'Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the human ... operated as an immense release, a liberation. Hegel's treatment of human culture, of institutions and the arts, involved the same dissolution of hard-and-fast dividing walls, and had a special attraction for me.'
 - 14 See Rorty (1982: 82): 'What ... Hegel had seen ... was that we can eliminate epistemological problems by eliminating the assumption that justification must repose on something other than social practices and human needs.'
 - 15 See Dewey (1977: 43): 'It was the work of Hegel to attempt to fill in the empty reason of Kant with the concrete contents of history. The voice sounded like the voice of Aristotle, Thomas of Aquino and Spinoza translated into Swabian German; but the hands were as the hands of Montesquieu, Herder, Condorcet and the rising historical school.'
 - 16 See Rorty (1989: 60): 'On Hegel's [account], moral philosophy takes the form of an answer to the question "Who are "we", how did we come to be what we are, and what might we become?" rather than an answer to the question "What rules should dictate my actions?"' In other words, moral philosophy takes the form of historical narration and utopian speculation rather than of a search for general principles.'
 - 17 See, for instance, Rorty (1995a: 199): 'Dewey took seriously Hegel's famous remark that philosophy paints its gray on gray only when a form of life has grown old. For Dewey, this meant that philosophy is always parasitic on, always a reaction to, developments elsewhere in culture and society.'
 - 18 Quotations from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* are from Knox's translation.
 - 19 On the contrast between 'Philosophy' (capitalized) and 'philosophy' (uncapitalized), see Rorty (1982: xiv-xv): "philosophy", like "truth" and "goodness", is ambiguous. ... "philosophy" can mean simply what Sellars calls "an attempt to see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term" ... But the word can also denote something more specialized, and very dubious indeed. In this second sense, it can mean following Plato's and Kant's lead, asking questions about the nature of certain normative notions (e.g., "truth", "rationality", "goodness") in the hope of better obeying such norms ... I shall capitalize the term "philosophy" when used in this second sense, in order to help make the point that Philosophy, Truth, Goodness, and Rationality are interlocked Platonic notions. Pragmatists are saying that the best hope for philosophy is not to practice Philosophy.'

- 20 Vocabularies are 'final' not because there are *a priori* limits to human language, but 'in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force' (Rorty 1989: 73).
- 21 On the contrast between the 'unconscious' use of logical categories in 'natural logic' and the philosophical task of making explicit the objective 'logical nature' of human thought, see SL, 15–17. The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 22 For a convincing reading of Hegel's idealism as a conceptual realism, see Stern (2009).
- 23 Rorty thinks that one is entitled to interpret a great thinker in an unusual way, as long as one manages to make the best of it: 'Just as there were sixteen different ways of reacting to Hegel in his day, there were sixteen different ways of reacting to Heidegger; and I think it's pointless to ask what was the "true" message of either Hegel or Heidegger – they were just people to bounce one's thoughts off of' (Rorty 2006: 51).
- 24 See also Rorty (2006: 41): 'I relate [the dissolution of the barrier between philosophy and literature] mainly to the difference between Kant and Hegel, between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.'
- 25 On this contrast between 'systematic' and 'edifying' philosophy, see Rorty (1979: ch. 8).
- 26 Here, Rorty's claim echoes the well-known suggestion that the *Phenomenology* is the philosophical counterpart of a *Bildungsroman*: see, for instance, Hyppolite (1974: 11).
- 27 Such a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is quite close to the one proposed by Terry Pinkard (1994).
- 28 On the many varieties of historicism, see Beiser (2007). A lot of self-proclaimed historicists (Ranke, Droysen, Burckhardt, Dilthey) saw Hegel 'as their main enemy' because of the supposedly untenable metaphysical assumptions of his philosophy of history. Conversely, Hegel was firmly opposed to 'stronger' versions of historicism, namely Savigny and Hugo's historical school of law. See, for instance, PR, §3 R, 21–22: 'By obscuring the difference between the historical and the philosophical study of right, it becomes possible to shift the point of view and slip over from the problem of the true justification of a thing to a justification by appeal to circumstances, to deductions from presupposed conditions which in themselves may have no higher validity, and so forth. To generalize, by this means the relative is put in place of the absolute and the external appearance in place of the true nature of the thing.'
- 29 Of course, such a complex metaphilosophical stance involves a deep underlying tension between the historicist side and the speculative one. On the possibility of an indefinite historical progress of Hegelian philosophy itself, see Christian Weisse's famous (and apparently unanswered) letter to Hegel, dated 11 July 1829 (LE, 539–540).
- 30 See how Rorty translates Hegel's dictum: 'I construe [Hegel's definition of philosophy: "holding your time in thought"] to mean "finding a description of all the things characteristic of your time of which you most approve, with which you unflinchingly identify, a description which will serve as a description of the end toward which the historical developments which led up to your time were means"' (Rorty 1989: 55). As Pippin (2016: 86–87) rightly points out, Rorty's translation

- of 'erfasst' as 'held' does not fully capture what Hegel means, namely 'rationally comprehended'. 'To comprehend *what is*, this is the task of philosophy, because *what is*, is reason' (PR, 15).
- 31 See Rorty (1995b: 123): 'Coming from the historicist side of Hegel – the side which is most prominent at the end of the introduction [*sic*] to the *Philosophy of Right* – I have trouble seeing how "thought" can have a system of contents, as opposed to a series of reactions to problems.'
 - 32 This line of criticism could also be applied to Brandom's linguistic reading of Hegel (see Pippin 2005: 390–398), even if Brandom manages to provide a far more interesting account of 'what is living' of Hegel's idealism.

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The Logic of Difference in Hegel and Derrida

Johannes-Georg Schüle

Deconstruction and metaphilosophy

Is deconstruction a metaphilosophical theory? Derrida gave an unambiguous answer: deconstruction is 'not a method, a doctrine, a speculative metaphilosophy, but *what arrives, what comes about*' (Derrida 2001: 54). In stressing the event-like character of deconstruction, Derrida reminds us that he intended neither to formulate his own theory nor to work out a meta-perspective on what philosophy is.¹ Rather, deconstruction typically presents itself as a critical approach to philosophical and other texts, strictly context-bound, always engaging specific argumentative structures: 'The movements of deconstruction do not put a strain on [*solliciter*] structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, they do not focus their strikes, except by inhabiting these structures' (Derrida 2016: 151). As deconstruction operates from within a given philosophical position, it borrows 'from the old structure the strategic and economic resources of subversion' (Derrida 2016: 151). In this sense, deconstruction can be seen as an immanent critique of particular philosophical (and other) positions but not as a metaphilosophy, which would sovereignly reflect on what philosophy is.²

Yet, as a matter of fact, many of Derrida's deconstructive readings, especially in his early writings, argue against a certain metaphilosophical idea of what philosophy allegedly is: *metaphysics of presence*.³ In light of his explicit repudiation of any metaphilosophical ambition, the apodictic language he uses in *Speech and Phenomena* when he touches on the metaphysics of presence is quite astonishing:

[We believe] *within* the metaphysics of presence, within philosophy as knowledge of the presence of the object, as the being-before-oneself of knowledge in consciousness ... quite simply and literally, in absolute knowledge as the *closure* if not the end of history. And we believe *that such a closure has taken place*. The history of being as presence, as self-presence in absolute knowledge, as consciousness of self in the infinity of *parousia* – this history is closed ... The history of presence is closed, for 'history' has never meant anything but the presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) of Being, the production and recollection of beings in presence, as knowledge and mastery ... This history is closed when this infinite absolute appears to itself as its own death.

(Derrida 1973: 102)

Derrida presents what he calls 'metaphysics of presence' as a striving for 'knowledge and mastery' of everything there is. According to him, this striving informs the history of Western philosophy on a meta-level and thus may appear in many forms. Its accomplished form is 'absolute knowledge'. Derrida boldly claims that the striving for absolute knowledge has reached a limit when it realizes its 'own death', its failure. In pointing out an inherent failure, he argues against the metaphilosophical idea of what Western philosophy allegedly is neither on the basis nor in favour of an alternative metaphilosophical position. Showing that there is a kind of failure inherent in the metaphysics of presence, rather, manifests how deconstruction works as an immanent form of critique: deconstruction aims to show that the metaphysics of presence does not achieve what it pretends to achieve. Neither the knowledge nor the mastery of everything there is can be regarded as absolute. It is, however, crucial that this claim is not supported by a set of arguments that would work on their own. It is a finding that belongs within the argumentative context of a given philosophical position in which we can observe a striving for knowledge and mastery *and* its failure.

In many of his deconstructive readings Derrida uses the term *différance* to mark the points at which a specific metaphysics of presence immanently fails. Since it appears in different contexts, the term *différance* hints at connections between several of Derrida's deconstructive readings and may even resemble a metaphilosophical standpoint from which the failure of the metaphysics of presence may seem to become discernible at large. Put crudely, *différance* may appear to be the transhistorical principle that 'causes' the metaphysics of presence to fail. Derrida consciously deals with this semblance and explains that, in fact, *différance*

governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority ... Not only is there no kingdom of *différance* but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* with wishing to reign, believing that one sees it aggrandize itself with a capital letter.

(Derrida 1982: 22)

In this quotation, the metaphor of 'a kingdom' stands for, amongst other things, a positive theory of *différance* – a theory which would ostensibly provide us with the tools to 'know and master' what undermines the metaphysics of presence. Such a theory would amount to a metaphilosophical viewpoint of the history of the metaphysics of presence, one that would relieve us of the necessity of working through this tradition in order to encounter its immanent problems. Such a viewpoint is precisely what deconstruction does not aim for. Hence, Derrida works against any suggestion that deconstruction is an independent, metaphilosophical theory.

In sum, deconstruction deals with a metaphilosophical idea in a non-metaphilosophical way. The challenge for deconstruction, as an immanent critique, is to engage texts and confront the metaphilosophical idea that informs them – and not

to formulate an independent position. Precisely in the context of this approach, Hegel's philosophy represents a major challenge.

I argue in this chapter that it is in the confrontation with Hegel that deconstruction falters.⁴ Hegel's philosophy resists deconstruction because Hegel is, as Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology*, on the one hand, a radical metaphysician of presence who 'determined ontology as absolute logic; he assembled all the delimitations of being as presence; he assigned to presence the eschatology of *parousia*, of the self-proximity of infinite subjectivity' (Derrida 2016: 151). But he is at the same time, on the other hand, 'also the thinker of irreducible difference' (Derrida 2016: 153), which anticipates to a certain degree what Derrida circumscribes as *différance* and employs in the deconstruction of this very metaphysics.⁵ Thus, Hegel's role is highly ambivalent – and so are some of Derrida's remarks about Hegel's philosophy.

In what follows, I analyse the rudimentary traces of an argument in Derrida's scattered remarks on Hegel's conception of difference, which he, however, never applied in a properly deconstructive manner. I then consider the specific context in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, where this argument potentially could have been applied to deconstruct Hegel's position, namely the argumentative stretch in the Logic of Essence in which Hegel initially discusses several conceptions of difference and ultimately presents the resolution of difference. In conclusion, I argue that Hegel's view of difference immunizes itself against deconstruction but – as it cannot sufficiently account for a radically destructive difference – is still, from Derrida's perspective, to be rejected.

The traces of an argument: Derrida's comments on Hegel's conception of difference

Derrida did not write a compact text on the problem of difference in Hegel. Rather, we find in his writings several remarks that allow us to infer what he thought about Hegel's conception of difference. In this chapter, I argue that there are traces of a critical, deconstructive argument to be found in Derrida's scattered remarks if they are considered together.⁶ The argument holds, firstly, that Hegel has a conception of difference that shares important features with Derrida's *différance* – in this perspective Hegel anticipates to a certain degree Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence. However, the argument holds, secondly, that Hegel ultimately abandons this conception of difference – and thus appears as a radical metaphysician of presence. Remarkably, this argument assigns an ambivalent role to Hegel in the history of the metaphysics of presence, but it does not undertake a deconstructive intervention; that is, it does not show how Hegel's thinking was in any way fragile. If we look at some of the most prominent amongst Derrida's remarks on Hegel, it may seem easy to discern why many readers have come to the conclusion that Derrida remains – subtleties aside – an anti-Hegelian thinker. Consider for example the following two quotations, in which Derrida contrasts *différance* with Hegel's idea of '*Aufhebung*':

If there were a definition of *différance*, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian *relève* wherever it operates.

(Derrida 1981b: 40–41)

In fact, I attempt to bring the critical operation [of deconstruction; J.S.] to bear against ... a dialectics of the Hegelian type ... for Hegelian idealism consists precisely of a *relève* of the binary oppositions of classical idealism, a resolution of contradiction into a third term that comes in order to *aufheben*, to deny while raising up, while idealizing, while sublimating into an anamnestic interiority (*Erinnerung*), while *interning* difference in a self-presence.

(Derrida 1981b: 43)

Derrida suggests in these passages that he is critical of Hegel, whom he presents as a totalitarian thinker striving to integrate all differences into a single philosophical system. Whereas Hegel is said to work on the *resolution* and thus the *reduction* of difference, Derrida obviously claims that we should grant a much higher importance to difference as such, before and independent of its reduction. For Derrida, 'the conflictuality of *différance*' can, as he emphasizes, 'never be totally resolved' (Derrida 1981b: 44).

In this context, however, it is almost impossible to overlook the fact that Derrida does not in fact simply oppose Hegel. Rather, he takes an ambivalent, hesitant stance. For example, he writes that showing how deconstruction relates to Hegel's philosophy is 'a difficult labor ... which in a certain way is interminable, at least if one wishes to execute it rigorously and minutely' (Derrida 1981b: 43–44). The reason why Derrida hesitates to articulate an unambiguous position towards Hegel has to do with the difficulty of distinguishing his view of difference from Hegel's:

I have attempted to distinguish *différance* (whose *a* marks among other things, its productive and conflictual characteristics) from Hegelian difference, and have done so precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up (according to the syllogistic process of speculative dialectics) into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis.

(Derrida 1981b: 44)

Three points in this passage deserve to be noted. Firstly, Derrida tells us that his view of difference could be distinguished from the conception of *contradiction*, which Hegel develops in the *Science of Logic*. Secondly, the problem with contradiction in Hegel is, according to Derrida, that it is oriented towards a resolution of difference. Thirdly, the resolution of difference is the crucial problem; it instantiates a metaphysical synthesis in self-presence. Against the backdrop of these three aspects, the reason for Derrida's ambiguous position towards Hegel becomes conceivable:

Différance (at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel ... everything, what is most decisive, is played out, here, in what Husserl called 'subtle nuances,' or

Marx 'micrology') must sign the point at which one breaks with the system of the *Aufhebung* and with speculative dialectics.

(Derrida 1981b: 44)

Différance thus written, although maintaining relations of profound affinity with Hegelian discourse (such as it must be read), is also, up to a certain point, unable to break with that discourse (which has no kind of meaning or chance); but it can operate a kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement of it.

(Derrida 1982: 14)

Key in these passages are the 'almost absolute proximity' and the 'profound affinity' that Derrida acknowledges between *différance* and Hegel's conception of difference. Hence, *différance*, on the one hand, must designate a breaking point with Hegel; on the other hand, it cannot really break away from Hegel's philosophy because of the deep affinity that still connects *différance* with Hegel's conception of difference. Thus, breaking with Hegel in what concerns difference does not entail a direct refusal but rather a small, yet radical, 'displacement' of his conception. If we take Derrida at his word, then he is in fact far from turning away from Hegel. Rather, he agrees with Hegel's conception to a certain degree and tries to critically transform it.

What is it exactly that Derrida tries to achieve by taking this ambivalent approach to Hegel? We have already seen that he aims specifically at Hegel's understanding of 'contradiction'. To see what Derrida considers to be problematic about this concept, a footnote in *Dissemination* is instructive:

The movement by which Hegel determines difference as contradiction ('Der Unterschied überhaupt ist schon der Widerspruch *an sich*', *The Science of Logic* II, I, chap. 2, C) is designed precisely to make possible the ultimate (onto-theo-teleological) sublation of difference. *Différance* – which is thus by no means dialectical contradiction in this Hegelian sense – marks the critical limit of the idealizing powers of relief wherever they are able, directly or indirectly, to operate. *Différance* inscribes contradiction, or rather, since it remains irreducibly differentiating and disseminating, contradictions. In making the 'productive' (in the sense of general economy and in accordance with the loss of presence) and differentiating movement, the *economic* 'concept' of *différance* does not reduce all contradictions to the homogeneity of a single model. It is the opposite that is likely to happen when Hegel makes difference into a movement within general contradiction. The latter is always onto-theological in its foundation.

(Derrida 1981a: 6, n. 8)

In this quotation, Derrida once more lays out his basic point that *différance* is meant to resist the resolution of difference in Hegel. Whereas Hegel reduces difference to a homogeneous and exclusive model, *différance* remains multifaceted and disseminative. Note that Derrida still proceeds cautiously: he does not straightforwardly say that Hegel *does reduce* difference to a homogeneous model; rather, he holds that, given Hegel's conception, such a reduction *is likely* – thus, not guaranteed – to happen.

The most instructive information in this footnote is to be found in the first sentence, including the brackets. Derrida tells us that Hegel determines difference as contradiction, and by doing this he prepares the category of the 'Ground' in which the resolution of difference takes place. Thus, understanding difference as contradiction with Hegel implies a teleology that leads to the resolution of difference. Furthermore, he cites in brackets a sentence from Hegel's conception of 'absolute difference' in the *Logic of Essence*. This is an important hint of where to look in Hegel's writings to find the analysis that is crucial for Derrida, even though he does not comment on it here.

In another footnote, at the margins of Derrida's text *Violence and Metaphysics*, we again find a statement about 'absolute difference'. This statement is more specific and sheds an interesting light on what exactly Derrida appreciates in Hegel's conception: 'Pure difference is not absolutely different (from nondifference). Hegel's critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here, doubtless, the most uncircumventable theme. Hegel thought absolute difference, and showed that it can be pure only by being impure' (Derrida 1978: 41, n.).

Derrida makes a direct claim here: Difference cannot be considered independently from identity; rather, difference is an impure concept; *pure* difference is essentially an *impure* difference. According to Derrida, this is precisely what Hegel has shown in his consideration of 'absolute difference' in the *Logic of Essence*, which he then cites extensively.

To obtain a more precise idea of what 'the homogeneity of the single model', to which difference is allegedly reduced in Hegel, consists, Derrida's early essay 'From Restricted to General Economy' is an important source. Derrida writes that in Hegel 'nothing must be definitely lost in death' and the 'notion of *Aufhebung* ... is laughable in that it signifies the *busying* of a discourse losing its breath as it reappropriates all negativity for itself' (Derrida 1978: 324). He describes the logic of *Aufhebung* in the following way: 'A determination is negated and conserved in another determination which reveals the truth of the former' (Derrida 1978: 348). As we will see, this description matches quite well the model of reflection that Hegel introduces in the *Logic of Essence*.

Before we turn to Hegel, the passages from Derrida's writings that we have considered so far enable us to extract the following argument:

- a. Derrida does not simply criticize Hegel. He affirms to a certain degree what Hegel calls 'absolute difference'. What Hegel says about absolute difference must be to a certain degree compatible with the fact that difference for Derrida is multifaceted, disseminative and irreducible to a single model.
- b. Derrida reproaches Hegel for resolving difference by reducing it to a single model of thinking about difference. The conception in which this begins to take place is, according to Derrida, that of contradiction in the *Logic of Essence*. This suggests that what Derrida affirms in 'absolute difference' must in one way or another get lost in 'contradiction'.
- c. If Derrida's remark that the view of difference, which he affirms must 'sign the point at which one breaks' with Hegel's reductionist view, is meant to be a deconstructive argument, it would not suffice simply to develop the desired view of difference independently of Hegel. Rather, a deconstructive argument would

have to mobilize Hegel's account of difference against the reduction that Hegel allegedly argues for in the context of contradiction. Such an argument would show that Hegel's conception is immanently fragile.

From 'absolute difference' to 'contradiction' in Hegel's Logic of Essence

To determine the philosophical implications of Derrida's argument, I propose in this chapter an analysis of Hegel's conception of difference as it is developed in the Logic of Essence. Hegel discusses several conceptions of difference in his extremely dense chapter 2 on 'The essentialities or the determinations of reflection'. Broadly construed, this chapter develops a conception of difference and identity appropriate for the overall task of the Logic of Essence.⁷ Hegel tries to convince us that essence in his sense does not constitute a second realm behind the reality of being – or one that is radically distinct from being. Rather, he argues that being and essence are identical in a way that accounts also for their difference. Hegel's term for the relation between essence and being is 'reflection' – and difference and identity are concepts that determine this reflection. For the purposes of this chapter, it is not necessary to trace Hegel's challenging exposition of the being/essence-relation in detail. As we approach Hegel's text from Derrida's critical remarks, difference and identity can be considered as systematic concepts.

To begin with, it is helpful to note that Hegel's exposition of the determinations of reflection proceeds in four steps: (1) 'identity', (2) 'difference', (3) 'contradiction' and (4) 'ground'.⁸ Section 2 on 'difference' is subdivided into (a) 'absolute difference', (b) 'diversity' and (c) 'opposition'. As he acknowledges Hegel's achievement in 'absolute difference', Derrida intervenes in this exposition close to the beginning, in step 2.a; with his critical comments on 'contradiction' he intervenes again towards the end, in step 3. Hence, the argumentative stretch between 2.a and 3 in Hegel's exposition must somehow prepare the resolution of difference. Furthermore, if Derrida's reading is adequate, we can expect to see in step 4, the 'ground', how Hegel establishes a single model according to which difference must be thought.

Derrida argues that 'absolute difference' is in Hegel not *absolute* in the sense of *pure*. Rather, it is a difference closely tied to identity. This is, indeed, Hegel's decisive idea. The fact that Hegel's exposition begins with 'identity' does not imply a priority of identity over difference. Rather, he defines identity as an immediate 'simple self-identity', which he distinguishes from forms of 'abstract identity' (SL, 356; WdL, GW11, 260)⁹ which are constituted through negative relations to something outside themselves. The 'self-identity' that Hegel has in mind does not entertain any relations with an outside; it is all-encompassing. Precisely because of the all-encompassing structure of identity, one might be tempted to think that Hegel did grant a priority to identity over difference. This conclusion is, however, not supported by the text. As Hegel rejects abstract identity because it depends on negative relations with an outside, he conceives of identity as a negative self-relation: 'it is equal to itself in its absolute negativity' (SL, 356; WdL,

GW11, 260). Identity is from the very beginning intertwined with negativity; it has a profound connection to difference. Hegel makes this connection explicit in step 2.a, Derrida's first point of intervention, where he states: 'Difference is the negativity that reflection possesses in itself ... the essential moment of identity itself' (SL, 361; WdL, GW11, 266). As a negative unity, identity proves to be difference: 'identity is absolute non-identity' (SL, 357; WdL, GW11, 262).

It is important to note that Hegel does not entirely dissolve identity into difference. He describes a corresponding dynamic for difference: difference, likewise, is only what it is as it entertains a negative relation *with itself*: 'Difference in itself is the difference that refers itself to itself; thus it is the negativity of itself, the difference not from another but *of itself from itself*; it is not itself but its other. What is different from difference, however, is identity' (SL, 361; WdL, GW11, 266). In relating negatively to itself, it negates what it is: difference; and in negating that it is difference, it turns into the opposite: into identity. Hence, what Hegel calls 'absolute difference' is 'therefore itself and identity' (SL, 361; WdL, GW11, 266).

The outcome of this dialectic can be summarized in the following way: if identity is difference, and difference is identity, both prove to be their opposite. We cannot strictly determine one against the other. Hence, neither identity nor difference is a stable or *pure* concept. This is what Derrida seems to affirm when he points to the lesson to be learned from Hegel. Hegel shows, indeed, that difference is impure not only because it cannot be thought independently of identity but also because it turns out *to be identity*. It is remarkable that Hegel's analysis of identity and difference does not seem to imply any kind of hierarchy. Difference and identity appear to be equivalent. Just as identity turns out to be difference, difference turns out to be identity. When Derrida sometimes speaks of an 'irreducible difference' in Hegel's conception of 'absolute difference', it is clear what he cannot mean: the irreducibility of difference cannot mean that difference would not be reduced at all. Difference is indeed reduced, in the sense of latin *re-ducere*, 'to trace back', and even reduced to identity. But the point is that difference is reduced to an identity which in turn is reduced again to difference. If absolute difference becomes identity, then this identity becomes difference. Hence, in this circle difference is ultimately reduced to itself. The point is that it is not reduced to an ultimate principle which would escape this circle.

Hegel prepares his first step in the argumentative stretch between step 2.a and 3 with the claim that identity and difference cannot be considered exclusively in their constant transitioning into each other – that is, in their 'Absolute Difference'. They must also be conceived as immediate, self-sufficient unities. In their immediacy, identity and difference relate to each other as 'different in general, indifferent to each other and to their determinateness' (SL, 363; WdL, GW11, 267). This is the conceptual kernel of 'Diversity' with which Hegel deals in step 2.b.

'Diversity' is a relation between units that lack a substantial connection. What is diverse is by definition *not identical*, *not the same* and thus *completely different*. The fact that diverse things are *not the same* implies within the constraints of the logic of 'Diversity' furthermore that they allegedly are what they are *without any dependence on the other*. According to Hegel, this philosophical standpoint can be expressed in the proposition "All things are different", or "No two things are alike" (SL, 365; WdL,

GW11, 270). Hegel connects this view with Leibniz, who told the famous story about a futile search for two tree leaves that were exactly alike. Because the logic of 'Diversity' only highlights the non-identity of things without saying anything specific about the things that are supposed to be diverse, 'Diversity' is a poor conception of difference.

It is telling that Derrida does not say anything about this conception. In fact, as 'Diversity' establishes non-identity and complete difference between a manifold of things, it establishes a kind of seemingly 'pure' difference between entities that seem to possess stable identities on their own. This idea is precisely what Derrida rejects. For him, Hegel is the one who has shown that difference cannot be thought independently of identity. What is more, Hegel sees 'Diversity' as a conception of pure difference, critically when he says that identity as absolute difference '*breaks apart into diversity*' (SL, 363; WdL, GW11, 267). Further, he argues towards the 'destruction' of the logic of 'Diversity' (SL, 364; WdL, GW11, 269). It deserves to be emphasized that Derrida would not have anything against this destruction, for he does not defend diversity against sublation. His concern is rather the impurity of identity (and of difference), which is not to be reduced.

'Opposition' in step 2.c of Hegel's account re-establishes identity against the pure difference for which 'Diversity' stands. Hegel defines 'Opposition' as 'the unity of identity and diversity; its moments are diverse in *one* identity, and so they are *opposites*' (SL, 367; WdL, GW11, 272). It is important to note that the unity that Hegel has in mind here is not a higher-order totality. It is in fact a 'flat' unity that exists not above but *between* the opposites: 'Each of these moments, in its determinateness, is ... the whole. It is the whole because it contains its other moment' (SL, 367; WdL, GW11, 272). The whole or the unity that connects two opposing things consists in the fact that neither of these things can be what it is without the other. In this regard, Hegel's point is not only that, for example, a thing which opposes another thing depends in its identity on the negation – in the sense of an exclusion – of the other. He goes further, as he argues that 'not being the other' or 'being different from the other' is an essential part of the identity of a thing. He therefore says, firstly, that each of the opposites 'refers itself to itself only as referring itself to its other' (SL, 368; WdL, GW11, 273). With this he wants to say, secondly, that each 'is itself and its other; for this reason, each has its determinateness not in an other but within' (SL, 368; WdL, GW11, 273). This quite radical idea is already the seed for the emergence of 'Contradiction'.

'Contradiction' in step 3 makes explicit an implication that lies in 'Opposition'. Hegel recapitulates the basic structure of 'Opposition' in the following way: 'Each moment is self-mediated through its other and contains this other. But it is also self-mediated through the non-being of its other and is, therefore, a unity existing for itself and excluding the other from itself' (SL, 374; WdL, GW11, 279). The important point is obviously that 'excluding the other' and 'containing the other' go hand in hand. This point depends on the idea that if something contains its other, it *is* its other. Further, if it at once is the other *and* excludes the other, it essentially excludes itself from itself. Hegel introduces the terminology of 'the positive' and 'the negative' to describe this logical relation. We can consider, for example, a thing as something positive: *it is what it is*. In its positivity, it depends on the exclusion of another thing to which it is, by definition, opposed. Hegel explains that this thing's positivity is contradictory

because 'by the excluding of the negative, it makes itself into a negative, hence into the other which it excludes from itself' (SL, 375; WdL, GW11, 280). The positive excludes its other, the negative; yet, as it excludes something from itself, it turns out to be in itself a negative as well; and if it is itself a negative, and the negative is what it excludes from itself, it ultimately excludes itself from itself. It excludes itself because it becomes its opposite and thus precisely that which it negates. For Hegel, this is what constitutes the 'absolute contradiction of the positive', which is also 'immediately the absolute contradiction of the negative' (SL, 375; WdL, GW11, 280). The negative, too, constitutes itself through a negation, namely through a negation of the positive. By negating the positive, the negative excludes the positive and can thus be what it is. But by being what it is, it gains the positivity that it just negated: the negative is thus, according to Hegel, in a contradictory way 'identical with itself *over against identity*' (SL, 375; WdL, GW11, 280).

So far, it is hard to see what Derrida could have against Hegel's idea of contradiction. With the positive and the negative, Hegel does not introduce completely different concepts. Rather, he merely seems to deepen the initial understanding of identity and difference. Identity is difference, the positive is the negative – and vice versa. Since contradiction remains intertwined with identity, it can still be considered as an impure difference. In this context, Hegel states that 'difference as such is already *implicitly* contradiction' (SL, 374; WdL, GW11, 279) – Derrida mentions this quotation in German in the footnote in *Dissemination*. He thereby suggests that this sentence shows how all conceptions of difference in the Logic of Essence ultimately result in 'Contradiction'. However, it is not 'Contradiction' as such that appears as a problematic concept from Derrida's point of view. As it emphasizes the self-exclusion of the positive and the negative, it is in fact a radical version of exactly the conception that Derrida appreciates in Hegel. As Derrida says in the footnote in *Dissemination*, the problem with 'Contradiction' consists in its *preparatory function* for the resolution of difference.

Hegel's grounding of difference and the difficulty of its deconstruction

The problem of the resolution of difference becomes manifest in Hegel's statement in the chapter on 'Contradiction' that 'contradiction resolves itself' (SL, 376; WdL, GW11, 280). In the context of this resolution, Hegel introduces the concept of 'Ground' as step 4. The introduction of the 'Ground' evokes the idea that difference is resolved and at the same time also reduced to a foundation. In this sense, Hegel writes that difference 'founders', but 'in foundering it has gone back *to its foundation, to its ground*' (SL, 377; WdL, GW11, 282). Remember that, for Derrida, Hegel's grounding of difference implies its integration 'into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis' (Derrida 1981b: 44). Hegel's theory of grounding is thus precisely the point where for Derrida his metaphysics of presence becomes manifest. This assessment requires a careful analysis. What does it mean that difference is resolved in the sense of being integrated into an onto-theological synthesis?

On the one side, Hegel's idea of grounding holds that contradiction founders or dissolves, which suggests an *annulment* of difference. Hegel argues that the self-exclusion of the positive and the negative results in the fact that, in the process of negating their other, both simultaneously negate themselves. Hegel describes this transformation as a 'ceaseless vanishing of the opposites', which arises as 'the *first unity*' in the logic of grounding: 'it is the *null*' (SL, 376; WdL, GW11, 281). The first unity of the ground is 'null' in the sense in which Hegel describes the general structure of the movement of reflection at the beginning of the Logic of Essence as a '*movement from nothing to nothing and thereby back to itself*' (SL, 346; WdL, GW11, 250). This movement leads through 'nothing' in the sense of 'nothing that existed in a self-sufficient manner'. We see exactly such a dynamic unfold between the positive and the negative as these moments constantly transform into each other without reaching any permanent self-sufficient existence. The restlessness of negativity seemingly destroys all self-sufficiency – or in the language that Derrida uses, all points of presence seem to be ultimately dissolved in the process of resolving and positing determinations.

However, the other side of Hegel's idea of grounding holds that, at the same time, 'the result of contradiction is not only the null' (SL, 376; WdL, GW11, 281). Contradiction does not merely dissolve into nothing or the pure negativity of reflection because 'the self-exclusive reflection is at the same time *positing* reflection' (SL, 376; WdL, GW11, 281). What Hegel is getting at is this: self-exclusion does not result in nothing because it always implies also a positing. He argues: 'The positive and the negative constitute the positedness of the self-subsistence; their own self-negation sublates it. It is this positedness which in truth founders to the ground in contradiction' (SL, 376; WdL, GW11, 281). The point of his argument here is that it emphasizes the *positedness* of self-subsistence, and it speaks of the foundering of the *positedness* of self-subsistence, not of self-subsistence as such. The first aspect of the resolution of contradiction which led to a nullity could suggest that there was nothing self-subsistent, positive and present left. Everything, as it were, seems to get lost in a black hole of negativity. Hegel, however, makes clear that both determinations, the positive and the negative, still have self-subsistence, but a self-subsistence that is (a) posited in the process of reflection, and (b) simultaneously negated and suspended in the logic of self-exclusion. In this sense, Hegel concludes that self-subsistence 'makes itself into a positedness and equally sublates this positedness' – in precisely this process, difference has not only '*foundered* but in foundering it has gone back to its foundation, to its ground' (SL, 377; WdL, GW11, 282).

In the latter sense, contradiction does not dissolve into null and nothing, but it finds its true ground. Determining in what this ground consists is not easy. Hegel's ground is obviously not a substance or a supreme being in the traditional sense of an onto-theological entity, which some of Derrida's statements suggest. Based on the arguments Hegel develops at the beginning of the Logic of Essence, the ground is nothing but the reflective movement in which the dissolution of a determination is always accompanied by a new positing. Every resolution of a positive leads to a negative, which in turn appears again as a positive – and so on. Likewise, every resolution of a negative implies the positing of a positive – and so on. In this logic, Hegel's grounding of difference obviously does not entail a simple neutralization of difference in an overarching unity.

Other than Derrida says in at least one of his statements, the ground is not 'a third' that would simply incorporate difference. Yet, Derrida is right that, with the introduction of the ground, Hegel does in fact reduce 'all contradictions to the homogeneity of a single model' – a theoretical move, which is, on Derrida's account, 'always onto-theological in its foundation' (1981a: 6, n. 8).

Hegel's logic of grounding introduces a model which defines that every negation always involves the positing of something positive. There is thus no pure negation without a positive. Hegel emphasizes that 'the positing of both is *one* reflection' (SL, 375; WdL, GW11, 280). In the course of a single movement of reflection, not only do both the positive and the negative prove to be contradictory determinations but also their resolution immediately results in the emergence of the opposite determination. In the 'Introduction' to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explicitly declares that this model is of almost universal significance for his philosophical project: "The one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress* – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite *simple* insight into it – is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness.' (SL, 33; WdL, GW11, 38)

The logic which Hegel describes here requires that whenever something differs and goes beyond its identity, it still becomes *something else*. Because that which it becomes will be *something* again, it will again possess an identity. According to Hegel, this logic leads us around in a circle: *all things are themselves and not themselves. In so far as they are not themselves, they remain still something*. Everything that appears as different eventually gains again some form of identity, and then this identity is again surpassed. We can therefore say, in accordance with Derrida, that this circle defines a model of thinking difference, and this model, given the importance which Hegel assigns to it, becomes indeed absolute in Hegel's philosophical system. It is this circle, which Derrida calls a 'laughable ... discourse', that 'reappropriates all negativity for itself' (Derrida 1978: 324).

Laughing at and rejecting this discourse touches obviously on a crucial point in Hegel's system – a system that has, however, overcome metaphysical, onto-theological foundationalism. Yet, neither laughing nor rejecting Hegel's system is a deconstructive move. A deconstructive critique would have to show how Hegel's own conception immanently fails, that is, how his idea of difference could not be grounded such that every negative always proves to be a positive. Why does Derrida not perform such an immanent critique?

Hegel's model of thinking difference hardly offers an open flank to deconstruction. For a deconstructive critique of Hegel's model, we needed to find *a reason in Hegel's text* that forces us to doubt that difference turns into identity, the positive into the negative, and vice versa. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to immanently attack the closed logic in which difference and identity are what they are and not what they are. Since we cannot keep hold of one of the determinations against the other, it is as if Hegel invented an extremely hermetic logic designed to obviate an immanent critique. If we accept Hegel's claim that identity is difference, it is in his model impossible to argue that the same is not true in the opposite direction: we cannot then argue that

difference is not identity. If we wanted to uphold the latter, we would have to deny as well that identity was difference in the first place. The question with which Hegel leaves his readers seems to be whether they want to either accept or reject his position altogether.

The destructiveness of difference and its containment

The fact that Derrida does not deconstruct Hegel's model of difference (and identity) leaves the question open *why* he is critical of it. The mere fact that this model is *exclusive* seems to be the decisive point. Exclusivity is a problem if it literally *excludes* concrete possibilities to conceptualize issues that need to be thematized. An example of such an issue from one of Derrida's latest books, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, reveals where Derrida's and Hegel's conceptions meet but also where a point of disagreement lies:

Democracy is what it is only in the *différance* by which it defers itself and differs from itself. It is what it is only by spacing itself beyond being ... it is (without being) equal and proper to itself only insofar as it is inadequate and improper, at the same time behind and ahead of itself, behind and ahead of the Sameness and Oneness of itself.

(Derrida 2005: 38)

Derrida argues that the identity of democracy involves difference, a differing from itself, such that it does not possess a stable identity. Put concretely, democracy is not, on Derrida's account, entirely immune against the non-democratic. It cannot completely exclude the undemocratic from what it essentially is.

Even though Hegel did not comment on democracy in a comparable way, it is possible to describe Derrida's view at least to a certain degree on a structural level with what Hegel has developed in the Logic of Essence: *Democracy is what it is, and it is at the same time not what it is. Its positivity is a negativity*. As Derrida affirms Hegel's idea that we cannot consider difference adequately if we consider it independently of identity, it is at first hard to see what he could have against an application of Hegel's terminology on the logic of democracy.

Yet, Derrida's main aim is to point out a *danger* that comes with the differing identity of democracy: the possibility that a democracy puts itself radically into question. This possibility lies, according to Derrida, in the basic democratic values of freedom and equality: 'Democracy is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, its name' (Derrida 2005: 87). He argues that if freedom is taken seriously, democracies cannot fully exclude the possibility that they might be put fundamentally into question from within. Even the pursuit of anti-democratic goals cannot be obviated to the full extent. Derrida therefore coins the phrase that 'democracy has always been suicidal' (Derrida 2005: 33). This suicidal

tendency shows, on a structural level, that, for Derrida, *difference may potentially destroy identity*. This possibility hints at a disagreement with Hegel.

This disagreement can be demonstrated in a recourse to Hegel's third 'Remark' in the chapter on 'Contradiction'. Hegel explains there what contradiction implies for things in the world. He formulates a principle that states: 'All things are in themselves contradictory' (SL, 381; WdL, GW11, 286). He emphasizes in this context that 'contradiction is the root of all movement and life' (SL, 381–382; WdL, GW11, 286) and explains in more detail: 'Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself: indeed, force is this, to hold and endure contradiction within. If, on the contrary, a concrete existent were not capable of overreaching its positive determination and grasping the negative one at the same time, holding the two firmly together' (SL, 382–383; WdL, GW11, 287).

Thus, contradiction alone is not what defines 'being alive' for Hegel. It is about the capacity of a living entity to *contain* and *endure* contradiction. As Hegel acknowledges a certain possibility of breakdown, his and Derrida's positions are still quite close to each other. But Hegel highlights: '*Speculative thought* consists only in this, in holding firm to contradiction and to itself in the contradiction, but not in the sense that, as it happens in ordinary thought, it would let itself be ruled by it and allow it to dissolve its determinations into just other determinations or into nothing' (SL, 383; WdL, GW11, 287–288).

This passage makes clear that Hegel argues for a *contained difference* that is not equipped to fundamentally destroy identity and positivity. The model that he develops in the logic of grounding is designed to ensure this position. In Hegel's model, there is no room for a becoming-different that could not be described in terms of an alternation of positivity and negativity. Hegel's claim that every negative is also a positive, and vice versa, is a necessity for him. Being alive means upholding this necessity. This is what Derrida criticizes as 'the busying' of Hegel's discourse. It also manifests a certain striving to 'know and master' that Derrida describes as a distinctive characteristic of the metaphysics of presence.

Derrida, in contrast to Hegel, grants an unruliness to difference that cannot be entirely 'known and mastered'. We cannot expect that the destruction of an identity will necessarily be accompanied or succeeded by a new positivity. For Derrida, the danger of destruction is more sweeping. At the same time, he does not simply argue against forms of identity in the name of an ostensibly pure difference. Rather, he affirms in accordance with Hegel that identity is difference and difference is identity. But the difference which he sees in close connection with identity is potentially destructive such that a complete collapse of identity could be the result. The logic of difference that Hegel develops excludes the possibility of such a destruction. To insist that it is nevertheless possible pushes one to break with Hegel's model. Hegel would see such an insistence on the destructivity of difference as unspeculative and probably even irrational thinking. Destruction may indeed often be irrational. But insisting on the philosophical analysis of destructive processes is not irrational if we can point to phenomena that are exposed to this danger. Derrida might not have been successful in deconstructing Hegel, but he is well prepared to confront issues that do not fit into Hegel's model.

Notes

- 1 'Metaphilosophy' remains an open concept. See, for example, Lazerowitz' influential definition: 'Metaphilosophy is the investigation of the nature of philosophy, with the central aim of arriving at a satisfactory explanation of the absence of uncontested philosophical claims and arguments' (1970: 91). For an overview of the debate, see Miolli (2017).
- 2 In contrast to the reading I propose here, Bernhard Taureck (1998) has presented Derrida as a metaphilosophical thinker.
- 3 In a late interview with Dominique Janicaud (Janicaud and Derrida 2015: 453), Derrida explains that he 'did not think that there was only one metaphysics of presence, delimited by a linear circle. It is a plural field' – 'Nonetheless, since this expression was misleading, since it was often interpreted in polemical works and simplified as if I ignored or neglected all sorts of internal ruptures and interior differentiations, I abandoned it. It clarified and formalized issues at a certain moment, but I no longer use it.'
- 4 I develop a similar reading in more detail in Schülein (2016: 250–297).
- 5 See on this also de Boer (2011). For more literature on the topic, see Schülein (2016).
- 6 The remarks I mention in this section are a selection. There are more comments on Hegel in Derrida's writings to be found, for example, in *Glas* (Derrida 1986: 168a). For my reading of *Glas*, see Schülein (2016: 298–364).
- 7 On Hegel's concept of essence, see Houlgate (2011).
- 8 It can be disputed whether 'ground' is still a determination of reflection or already a step further. I leave this aside here.
- 9 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.

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Neo-Hegelian Metaphilosophy from Pittsburgh

Luca Corti

Introduction

This chapter is an exercise in ‘descriptive metaphilosophy’ (Rescher 1985: 261–265; 2014: xi), which addresses the views about philosophy (what it is, what it ought to do and how it ought to do it) developed by a recent wave of Hegelianism – whose major proponents, the so-called neo-Hegelians from Pittsburgh, are commonly understood to include John McDowell and Robert Brandom.

Although the definition of neo-Hegelians as a ‘school’ is debated – and the degree to which the group’s members share viewpoints varies according to the perspectives from which their accounts are assessed – there are nonetheless enough common views for their philosophies to be grouped together, if not in a school, at least in a family (cf. Maher 2012; Corti 2014, 2018; Redding 2020; Sachs 2020). When we focus on metaphilosophy, however, things look different, and these family resemblances appear less pronounced. In fact, they might even appear to be family struggles, since the insights of the two main representative of Pittsburgh neo-Hegelianism diverge substantially in this regard.

Since metaphilosophy is key to understanding McDowell’s and Brandom’s different projects and the kind of Hegelism they advocate, in this chapter I will isolate and discuss their metaphilosophical commitments. This will allow me both to highlight some problems within their views and to show how and where their commitments come into possible tension (and may be difficult to square) with Hegel’s own understanding of philosophy.

My reconstruction will operate at a general level. Mapping their thought in this way I hope will clarify the framework of this tradition of Hegelism as well as open up some space for further inquiry of and dialectical confrontation with Hegel’s thought.

In the first part, I will focus on McDowell’s ‘quietist’ understanding of philosophy, which has already been highly discussed. After considering how it is formulated, I will address two of its most problematic aspects. At a more metaphilosophical level, I will claim that McDowell could do more to take into account the consequences of a central tenet of his version of quietism: his claim that he is ‘doing therapeutic philosophy in *traditional* language’ (my emphasis). This seems to commit him to notions of *history*

and *tradition* that may need more reflective specification than they have yet received. On the other hand, at an exegetical level, I will show that commitment to a more substantial view of the historical nature of philosophical problems is not only typical of Hegel but can also be integrated with McDowell's account.¹

In the second part, I will focus on the other leg of Pittsburgh neo-Hegelianism by investigating Brandom's metaphilosophical remarks. Brandom's views are tied to a particular understanding of the notion of 'metaphysics', which is described in terms of the relation amongst various kinds of vocabularies. In particular, Brandom sees metaphysics as the distinct attempt to develop a vocabulary capable of *expressing* all other vocabularies at a given time – or put differently, a 'vocabulary in which everything can be said'. This attempt, as we will see, can be carried out in two basic ways, as what Brandom labels 'maniac metaphysics' or as 'modest metaphysics'. Interestingly, in response to possible therapeutic or quietist worries à la McDowell, Brandom stresses that his metaphysical endeavour is not motivated by pathological 'anxiety' but rather by healthy 'curiosity'. I will assess what Brandom means by this attitude, focusing on his definition of metaphysics and the way it approaches Hegel's philosophy.² I will problematize two central aspects that are distinctive of Brandom's account: his claim that the vocabulary employed in metaphysical redescription is *contingent* and *arbitrary* and his assertion that the articulation of philosophical vocabulary (together with the philosophical concepts expressed) need not involve *developmental* argumentation but can be crafted through a sort of philosophical 'engineering'.

For those interested in intellectual genealogies, I will trace the metaphilosophical opposition between Brandom and McDowell back to Richard Rorty, who could be considered the father of Pittsburgh neo-Hegelian metaphilosophy. In Rorty – who coined the label 'Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelianism' and from whose thought both philosophers draw heavily – one can identify the tendencies that later get developed, in diverging directions, by both McDowell and Brandom. On the one hand, Rorty advocates a form of so-called Wittgensteinian quietism that considers philosophy as a therapy and later gets taken up by McDowell;³ on the other hand, Rorty's interest in new vocabularies and his plea for new attempts at redescription can be seen as inspiration for the kind of 'curious' investigation into the expressive power of new vocabularies that Brandom considers the main metaphilosophical motivation of his project. In this sense, my general survey aims to demonstrate why Rorty is a productive starting point for illuminating Hegel's appeal for Pitt-Neo-Hegelians and understanding how their positions developed.

Doing 'therapeutic philosophy in traditional language': McDowell's Hegelian quietism

John McDowell has been identified widely as one of the main advocates of philosophical 'quietism' or 'therapeutic' philosophy, a stance that has attracted at least as much attention as his Hegelianism.⁴

Inspired by Wittgenstein, quietistic metaphilosophical stances are characteristically defined by their resistance to laying out 'positive' or 'constructive' theories.⁵

Instead, their aim is to dispel the mistaken assumptions responsible for generating specific philosophical problems, with the effect of dissolving those problems rather than solving them through the production of constructive philosophy. Following Wittgenstein, McDowell's quietism adopts a set of medical metaphors to illustrate what he takes to be the diagnostic task of philosophical reflection. References to 'anxieties', 'phobias' and 'obsessions' are pervasive in his work and guide McDowell's way of looking at philosophical problems as well as how he problematizes the views of opponents and fellow philosophers. He famously identifies 'epistemological anxieties' and 'transcendental anxieties'⁶ as characterizing thinking about the relation between mind and world, as well as 'epistemological obsessions' (McDowell 1998c: 366) and 'epistemological syndromes' (McDowell 1998a: 396; 2009a: 254) as motivating many current and past theoretical constructions of truth, norms and similar concerns in various fields. This approach also characterizes his discussion of other philosophers' views: Richard Rorty gets diagnosed with a 'phobia of objectivity' (McDowell 2000c: 120) and a form of 'metaphysical infantilism' (McDowell 2000c: 120), Wright is seen as suffering from an 'obsession' to keep meanings out of consciousness (McDowell 1998b: 309), Brandom is considered to be nurturing a kind of 'phobia' of experience and states of consciousness (McDowell 2002: 280–281), and Robert Pippin is described as advocating an interpretation of Hegel that is vitiated by 'anxiety-a fear of relativism' (McDowell 2009b: 183).

Given such claims, one might ask – as scholars have of Wittgenstein (Brand 2000; Jacqueline 2014; De Mesel 2015) – how literally such language should be interpreted and whether this way of speaking is merely illustrative or analogical. As in the case of Wittgenstein, it would be incorrect to think that McDowell literally is performing *psychological* diagnoses and therapies.⁷ However, such language is not neutral either; we cannot dismiss it as a simple rhetorical method or innocuous *façon de parler*. Psychological metaphors deeply permeate McDowell's way of doing philosophy, which is imbued with (and shaped by) diagnostic vocabulary.

Before discussing this aspect of McDowell's work, however, it is worth considering the target and scope of his references to therapy. Indeed, we find that, guided by the Wittgensteinian insight that 'the philosopher's treatment of a question is *like* the treatment of an illness' (Wittgenstein 2009: §255), McDowell understands quietism not as *global* (i.e. all questions are like illnesses) but as *local* (i.e. only some questions are treated as illnesses).⁸ Against such targets, Wittgenstein notably defended a pluralistic account of the possible philosophical strategies or 'therapies' one might adopt in treatment of a question: 'there is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were' (Wittgenstein 2009: §133).⁹ For McDowell, however, there seem to be *some* methodological constants that, at least at a general level of description, characterize how he thinks philosophical questions should be 'therapeutically' approached. As he explains,

Quietism involves being suspicious of philosophers' questions, before we even start interesting ourselves in the specifics of how they are answered. If someone invites us into substantive philosophy by, say, asking something of the form, 'How is such and such possible?', we should not at once embark on trying to give a positive

philosophical account of such and such, whatever it is. First we should ask why we are expected to find a difficulty in the possibility of such and such, whatever it is. Often the best answer that can be given will seem to carry conviction only to the extent that it induces us to forget something obvious. Revealing such a defect in the supposed pretext for the 'How possible?' question, and so entitling ourselves not to have to bother with it, at any rate if that is the ground on which we are invited to find it pressing, is a distinctive kind of philosophical achievement.

(McDowell 2009c: 371)¹⁰

Several insights emerge here: one is an encouragement to hold a 'suspicious' attitude towards philosophical questions;¹¹ the second is a strong emphasis on the fact that philosophical problems are connected to forgetting something 'obvious'. The third is that, once the problems we find pressing have been shown to rest on a set of questionable assumptions which are no longer compelling (in light of the obvious facts we had forgotten), the problematic way of looking at the issue will vanish.

This manner of making symptoms-questions disappear is radically different from 'ignoring' them or engaging in some escapist strategy (like drinking or listening to music). As McDowell stresses, it requires time-consuming therapeutic work and painstaking philosophical reflection.¹²

McDowell famously adopts this kind of philosophical approach in dealing with a set of influential questions, including *scepticism* ('The aim ... is not to answer skeptical questions, but to begin to see how it might be intellectually responsible to ignore them, to treat them as unreal, in the way that common sense has always wanted to' [McDowell 1994: 133]), as well as the problems tied to *following a rule* or *the idea of norms as natural* ('there is no need for constructive philosophy, directed at the very idea of norms of reason' [McDowell 1994: 94]).

One question that might arise at this point, in light of the above-mentioned formulation, concerns what it means for something to be characterized as 'obvious' and why, in McDowell's view, recalling 'something obvious' is far from an easy task and instead requires a good deal of philosophical work (later I will address what kind of work). After all, why should recognizing the obvious be so difficult? Isn't something 'obvious' by definition something that is immediately recognized as such?

Hopefully these questions do not represent anxieties and by asking them one is not already beginning on the wrong foot. Certainly, they cannot be construed as asking for a constructive theory of the obvious. However, it seems that some grasp of the notion of obvious (though not through a definition!) is needed if we are to avoid to produce therapeutic benefits only by evoking the obvious as a 'hocus pocus' (or what Sellars calls a 'verbal magic').

One way of responding to this issue might be to mobilize the understanding of the obvious that William Quine offered in the following reported exchange: 'Once in such a course, after he wrote a proof on the board, a student raised his hand and asked impatiently, "Why bother writing out that proof? It's obvious." To which Quine replied, "Young man, this entire course is obvious"' (reported in Mizrahi 2019).

This sense of 'obvious' as that which is analytically true, however, does not seem to be what McDowell has in mind. Indeed, if not taken as a synonym for

what is analytically true, 'something obvious' becomes distinguishable from – and does not necessarily coincide with – 'something true'. Following a common-sense understanding of the term, we might say that the two notions can (and maybe should) be kept logically distinct: not only because different people may accept different and opposing claims as obvious but also because what one finds obvious might be utterly false. If the function of our turn to 'something obvious' is merely a *pharmakon* for alleviating some philosophical anxieties, it seems that purpose can easily be fulfilled without reference to the question of truth, which would not need to play a role in our quietist metaphilosophy. Yet, McDowell's reminders seem to have a wider scope than the mere disappearance of symptoms and, in one way or another, seem to link such disappearance to a consideration bearing some degree of truthfulness (a notion that we do not need a 'theory' to understand, however, but rather some recollection of platitudes or obvious considerations).¹³

The relation between what is 'obvious' and what is 'true' in such a context has not been extensively addressed and might generate some metaphilosophical anxieties. Guided by some of McDowell's passages (and Wittgensteinian ones that move in the same direction),¹⁴ interpreters have quickly – perhaps too quickly – equated 'obvious' with 'common sense' and identified the goal of the therapy as a reconciliation with the latter. This has been presented as constituting one of McDowell's biggest divergences with Hegel. As Robert Stern reminds us:

While McDowell wants to vindicate common sense, to put us back in touch with tables, cats and other people, and while Hegel is certainly no sceptic on this score, Hegel wants much more – to vindicate a kind of conception of philosophy that Kant had thought was impossible, and which would also appear to have no place in McDowell's therapeutic, late-Wittgensteinian outlook.

(Stern 1991: 260)

Hegel's views on the relationship between philosophy and common sense appear to be complex and are certainly not reducible to the idea that philosophy should somehow endorse common sense, taken as a normative standard, or reconcile itself with it (Quante 2011: chs 1 and 2; Giladi 2018). Moreover, with respect to the question of 'truthfulness', Hegel seems to think that common sense (if that is what we understand by our appeal to 'something obvious') contains both *untrue* and *incorrect* elements that need to be unveiled by philosophical reflection.¹⁵ In this sense, McDowell's hope that Hegel's philosophy could be understood as an attempt to perform therapeutic philosophy¹⁶ has seemed reductive: *some* aspects of Hegel's philosophy might be understood in this way but not all. Furthermore, the fact that common sense is *obvious* does not seem to perform any substantial therapeutic work in Hegel.

Some scholars have also underscored that the kind of conceptuality McDowell employs to 'remind' the obvious is quite elaborate. Charles Larmore (2002: 195) stresses this point most clearly: 'in reality, [McDowell] has embarked upon the construction of a comprehensive theory of mind and world'.¹⁷ McDowell replies by claiming that 'to remind ourselves of what is obvious, or would be if it were not for philosophy, is quite different from putting forward a substantive view' (McDowell 2002: 294). This appears

difficult to dispute. Yet, this response, together with McDowell's above-mentioned formulation of philosophical therapy as aiming to dissolve 'how-possible' questions, leaves open the problem of what might constitute viable strategies for recalling the obvious and how they might count as *philosophical*. McDowell does not dwell much on this issue. From a logical point of view, a signpost, song or poem might work equally as well as means for providing 'reminders of the obvious' and defusing how possible questions (maybe not drinking, however, though in some contexts it too might work). It is difficult to establish whether these methods would count as viable options for McDowell and whether the resulting therapy would count as distinctly philosophical. Though not every potential strategy would be considered philosophical (or would need to be), philosophical strategies seem to offer something distinctive for McDowell – provided that the term 'philosophy' retains a positive connotation.¹⁸ The minimal requirement for a philosophical quietist approach to be recognizably philosophical is that it grounds *rationally*, in some sense of the term, our entitlement to ignore or 'shrug shoulders' at a particular question. The question then becomes interesting: what does it mean to *rationally* ground such shrugging and in *how many* ways can one perform such therapy and get to the point where the question looks illusory (without performing constructive philosophy)? Part of the answer may be that philosophy offers *reasons* for ignoring certain questions – or making them vanish – and that is what is distinctive about philosophy itself. McDowell in fact uses an *argumentative* strategy to perform his therapy, which is partly what brings him to define his therapeutic project as 'constructive philosophy in another sense'¹⁹ – a phrase that has probably nurtured anxieties such as Larmore's. This seems to entail that, in a quietist spirit, there are particular ways of taking *arguments* to play the role of reminders of the obvious; therefore producing the therapeutic effects the quietist philosophers aim at.

This argumentative or 'quasi-constructive' aspect of McDowell's therapy foregrounds another important aspect of his thought pertaining to metaphilosophy: the relation of McDowell's quietism to the *history of philosophy*. Several of the anxieties that McDowell addresses are of a particular kind: they are historically situated. For instance, many of the anxieties that emerge in *Mind and World* are typical of modern philosophy.

My aim is to propose an account, in a diagnostic spirit, of *some characteristic anxieties of modern philosophy* – anxieties that centre, as my title indicates, on the relation between mind and world. Continuing with the medical metaphor, we might say that a satisfactory diagnosis ought to point towards a cure. I aim at explaining how it comes about that we seem to be confronted with philosophical obligations of a sort, and I want the explanation to enable us to unmask that appearance as illusion.

(McDowell 1994: xi; my emphasis)

The kind of anxieties that interest McDowell have a historical character, which means their discussion requires addressing the philosophical canon and their corresponding therapies involve employing a particular terminology drawn from the philosophical tradition. This historical element is what distinguishes McDowell from Wittgenstein, who deliberately did *not* engage in discussions of the tradition. McDowell, on the other

hand, casts problems in traditional terms and dissolves them in those same terms: both diagnosis and therapy are imbued with history.

It is true that much of what I put forward in my own person does not sound like reminders of what is merely obvious. My diction is often that of traditional philosophy. This is a divergence from Wittgenstein, and it is not an oversight. I explicitly claim (*Mind and World*, p.155, note 30) that 'moves in the language of traditional philosophy can be aimed at having the right not to worry about its problems, rather than at solving those problems.' If it is feasible to do therapeutic philosophy in traditional language, there is surely something to be said for it, if only that it might help us make contact with the targets of the therapy.

(McDowell 2002: 294)

'Do therapeutic philosophy in traditional language' is an interesting way of framing a metaphilosophical stance which, though it is not much discussed by McDowell, is worth exploring. One could ask to what extent a historical take and vocabulary are *necessary* to understand (and solve) philosophical problems. Moreover, to what extent are intellectual pathologies themselves limited to certain historical periods and what is the philosophical import of their historical situatedness, if any? To what extent are the common sense or 'obvious things' whose recall is the core of any therapy things to be characterized historically?

One way to answer these questions concerning the relation between therapy and history is with the response typical of Richard Rorty's therapeutic project. Rorty – by whom McDowell claims to have been deeply inspired, in *Mind and World* and elsewhere (McDowell 2000c: 101; 2002: xi) – advocated a position explicitly aiming to integrate Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach with historical sensitivity and thus foregrounding the *historical character* of a tradition and its relative pathologies. He notably maintained that 'Wittgenstein's flair for deconstructing captivating pictures needs to be supplemented by historical awareness' (Rorty 1979: 12). For Rorty, such supplementation might itself play a distinct therapeutic role: 'what the patient needs is not a list of his mistakes and confusions but rather an understanding of how he came to make these mistakes and become involved in these confusions' (Rorty 1979: 33). Retracing one's steps thus becomes a way of explicating a therapeutic role, on the one hand by identifying where mistakes have been made, and therefore giving an explanation of how we got into the current conceptual confusion, and on the other hand by showing alternatives that undermine how compelling the current way of seeing things seems.

This approach can be traced back to Wilfrid Sellars, who identified the diagnostic potential of historical reconstruction and defended it against alternative, argument-only metaphilosophical attitudes. For Sellars

There are two obvious ways in which a philosopher can attack a theory, which he believes to be mistaken. He can seek to reduce it to absurdity by developing its implications and showing them to be either mutually inconsistent or incompatible with the incontrovertible. Or he can attempt to trace the error back to its roots,

and show why those who defend it have been led to speak as they do. Of these two methods, it is clear that only the latter is capable of definitive results. A mistaken theory can be compared to a symptom of a disease ... By the use of inadequate medicaments one can often 'cure' the symptoms while leaving the disease untouched.

(Sellars 1952: 184)

Let's call this the Sellars–Rorty metaphilosophical thesis. It is a claim for the diagnostic import of reconstruction, namely historically understanding how some views have come to be formulated and how some philosophical problems have grasped our attention. Is this McDowell's stance on therapy? McDowell's position on this issue is by comparison less committed to reconstruction. He does not seem interested in offering an account of 'how' we came to be entangled in certain problems. This constitutes a difference between McDowell and Rorty as well as another key potential difference between Hegel's perspective and McDowell's. The distinctive *historical* character of some philosophical claims is, for Hegel, philosophically relevant, since it represents how a certain community has been led to speak in the way that it does. In the case of *philosophical symptoms* – to use the dominant metaphor of the approach – it is not irrelevant for Hegel that certain symptoms emerge in particular historical contexts or in a particular epoch. Furthermore, it is of philosophical significance to have a *narrative* addressing the emergence of various philosophical problems over time and their relation to each other. In McDowell's metaphilosophical approach, the historically produced nature of philosophical symptoms does not play a central role and does not appear to have any philosophical relevance. We might say that McDowell's metaphilosophical approach is in a sense historical but not, in Rorty's word, 'historicist'.²⁰ Some scholars are dissatisfied with this approach and do not think it is fully compatible with McDowell's insights on Hegel, for whom philosophical pathologies were not simply 'given' but always 'products' (Pinkard 2018).

Indeed, McDowell's claims in this area are not univocal. In fact, there are passages in which he seems to endorse philosophical problems as *perennial*, with some questions continuously re-emerging, albeit in various forms, over the course of history. 'Interesting philosophical afflictions are deep-seated. Even after temporarily successful therapy, they re-emerge, perhaps perennially, in new forms. If the risk of re-emergence is perennial, peace is always beyond the horizon' (McDowell 2002: 294). Elsewhere, however, McDowell seems to make more room for the historical character of problems, allowing each epoch to be characterized by its distinct philosophical questions. This applies especially to modernity.²¹ This raises the question of whether such a claim requires McDowell to develop a broader narrative about the historical emergence of certain philosophical problems. What does the *historical* characterization of some problems add to McDowell's therapeutic endeavour? Moreover, what would a metaphilosophy lose by renouncing such an appeal to history?

Notice that these questions are distinct, however, from another kind of dissatisfaction that has emerged amongst critics – a dissatisfaction with the monolithic vision of the philosophical tradition that emerges from McDowell's work and the debates surrounding it and which seems to present a simplistic view of philosophical modernity.²²

The need to integrate some kind of reflective historical consideration into the metaphilosophical project of doing quietist philosophy ‘in traditional terms’ also appears in connection with another issue, namely the ‘interminability’ of philosophical anxieties. Though some passages recalling Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘putting philosophy in peace’ have misled interpreters, McDowell does not hold in fact that a philosophical therapy would or should result in the complete disappearance of symptoms once and for all. As the above quote shows, McDowell’s quietist *medicine* is not a final treatment nor does it aim to give philosophy ‘perpetual peace’. As McDowell wrote in the afterword of *Mind and World*: ‘The impulse finds peace only occasionally and temporally’ (1994: 177). Rather, he sketches the image of contingent but arguably continuous re-emerging philosophical symptoms, which the philosopher has to treat locally, as they surface.

In general it is only to be expected that a therapy will work only against its immediate target, and the impulse to find philosophical mystery will show up later – perhaps immediately – in a different form, needing a different treatment. It can be worthwhile to make piecemeal moves to alleviate puzzlement, without any pretence of being able to anticipate what might happen next in the to-and-fro between the impulse towards constructive philosophy and therapeutic responses to its manifestations, let alone a pretence of having dealt with everything that might give someone pause.

(McDowell 2000b: 101)

McDowell claims to be addressing single manifestations of symptoms in a piecemeal way, without making predictions. Yet, mobilizing Hegelian insights, one might ask whether a more global understanding of historical development is necessary in order to adequately justify a therapeutic philosophical endeavour. Indeed, one could argue that global, retrospective (rather than prospective) historical consideration might be crucial: one understands more of a pathology by treating symptoms not independently and individually but in light of reflective, comprehensive consideration of the patient’s whole medical history. There are cases in which only such a holistic view is able to render certain things visible. Renouncing comprehensive retrospection for a piecemeal treatment might weaken the therapy. A more comprehensive narrative, however, might require a more substantial appeal to history than McDowell seems willing to admit. Representing a point of potential dialogue between McDowell and Hegelianism, such issues allow for the emergence of several metaphilosophical issues with continued relevance.

‘Maniac’ and ‘modest’ metaphysicians: Robert Brandom’s metaphilosophy

While McDowell adopts a quietist or therapeutic attitude, Brandom advocates what can in many ways be understood as an opposing, constructive approach: for Brandom, philosophy is not a therapy whose aim is to unravel knots in our thought but a positive

enterprise whose practice creates systems that are deeply productive. One of the most important sources of difference between these two Pittsburgh neo-Hegelian approaches therefore is located at the level of metaphilosophy.

It is in this context that Brandom makes use of a particular interpretation of the notion of 'metaphysics' to qualify his philosophical project, one that builds upon the notion of 'vocabulary' introduced by Richard Rorty and is cashed out in semantic terms.²³

For Brandom, a metaphysician is one who tries to develop a vocabulary by which to capture all our other idioms. The vocabularies privileged by metaphysicians in performing this task can vary: ranging from the vocabulary of natural science to that of the New Way of Ideas, which employs the language of ideas and impression. Regardless of what this vocabulary may be – 'God's vocabulary, or Nature's, or even Mind's, or Meaning's' (Brandom 2011: 20) – the ambition of the metaphysician is to use it to express all others idioms. In the words of Clifford Geerts, who Brandom quotes to illuminate his own views: the aim is a universal vocabulary in which 'everything can be said' (Brandom 2002: 116; 2008a: 227; 2008b: 136; 2011: 21).

This kind of enterprise, Brandom argues, can be performed in two ways: either 'modestly' or 'maniacally' (Brandom 2000a: 180). The maniacal metaphysician takes the privileged vocabulary as the criterion for establishing meaningfulness and excludes vocabularies that cannot be captured in its terms from the domain of meaning. In Brandom's words: 'What cannot be formulated in its preferred vocabulary is to be rejected as nonsensical' (Brandom 2000a: 180). Brandom considers traditional metaphysics maniacal in the sense that

it denigrates and dismisses what resists formulation in its favored terms as ontologically second class: as unreal, as mere appearance. So for Leibniz relations, space, and evil are unreal, relegated to the phenomenal realm of appearance. Later metaphysicians found themselves similarly rejecting as unreal such phenomena as time ... In a more contemporary semantic key, the term of disapprobation may be the semantic 'unintelligible' rather than the ontological 'unreal.'

(Brandom 2011: 24)

However, 'such a mean-spirited, suspicious, begrudging, exclusionary attitude is not the only one possible' (Brandom 2008a: 229). Brandom rejects such an attitude, and he does so by building upon the Rortyan thesis of the contingency of all vocabularies: since all vocabularies are contingent, there is firstly no reason to 'absolutize' one idiom over another and secondly no reason to take the impossibility of translating an expression from one vocabulary to another as a criterion of exclusion from the domain of intelligibility. 'There are always going to be some things that you've got a good story about. One can say in the base vocabulary these things from the target vocabulary. But then there are always going to be these awkward things that you *can't* say in the favored terms' (Brandom 2008b: 136).

Maybe we will never be able to express a poem by Coleridge in terms of electrodynamics. However, Brandom argues that this should not worry us. Instead, we must reject this demand for commensuration, which he calls 'imperialist' or

‘totalitarian’ (Brandom 2000a: 180) – the attitude typical of the maniacal metaphysician (‘I think that is the step one should not take’ [Brandom 2008b: 137]).

Yet, we should not disavow the basic metaphysical ambition of developing an all-encompassing idiom. For Brandom, it is possible after abandoning the maniacal stance to take a more relaxed stance towards global redescription. Such an attitude will lead to the type of modest metaphysics, understood ‘in a non-pejorative sense’ (Brandom 2003: 570), that Brandom himself defends. A modest metaphysics attempts to develop a vocabulary capable of capturing all other vocabularies available to the metaphysicians at a given time, without taking the privileged metaphysical vocabulary as the ultimate or as a basis for excluding other idioms: ‘The modest metaphysician aims only to codify the admittedly contingent constellation of vocabularies with which her time (and those that led up to it) happens to present her – *to capture her time in thought*’ (Brandom 2000a: 180–181; my emphasis).

Leaving the Hegelian allusion aside, this quote illustrates how Brandom sees a modest stance as enabling one to see the whole metaphysical enterprise as based on contingency and exposed to potential failure. Brandom thinks that ‘metaphysics in this sense is a perfectly reasonable undertaking, and that we potentially have a lot to learn from pursuing it’ – even when it fails (Brandom 2008a: 228).

In light of the ‘therapeutic’ or ‘diagnostic’ worries that such a conception might generate in the quietist camp, Brandom specifies that this metaphysical endeavour need not be considered pathological. It does not need to ‘be motivated by some deep-seated philosophical anxiety or puzzlement, the proper deflating diagnosis of which then exhibits or renders the task of exploring those relations otiose. *Simple curiosity*, the desire to deepen our understanding, can suffice as much for this sort of philosophical theorizing as for the empirical scientific variety’ (Brandom 2008a: 227; my emphasis).

Brandom’s approach appears thus rooted in a basic metaphilosophical attitude that he calls ‘curiosity’, which motivates exploration of vocabularies, and as the quote above shows, potentially shields him from quietist diagnoses (for curiosity is hardly a state that can be considered pathological or be pathologized, even taken in a metaphorical sense).

In adopting this modest metaphysics as the basis for his project, Brandom considers himself to share a set of metaphilosophical commitments with his *Doktorvater* Richard Rorty.²⁴ In fact, in addition to the therapeutic component of his philosophy that inspired McDowell, Rorty also notably advocates a distinctly curious philosophical attitude that is paradigmatically expressed in the invention of new vocabularies – both philosophical and non-philosophical – capable of opening up new descriptive possibilities (Rorty 2000: 349). In fact, in discussing the therapeutic idea of ‘giving peace’ to philosophy, Rorty distances himself from a particular understanding of quietism that sees a final peaceful state as a regulative ideal for philosophy.

I do not share this wholesale quietistic impulse ... I do not believe that there is, in addition to the so-called fixations and obsessions of us philosophical revisionists, a peaceful, non-obsessed, vision of how things deeply, truly, unproblematically are. If there were – if there were something like what Cavell calls ‘the Ordinary’ – I doubt that I should have any interest in dwelling within it.

(Rorty 2000: 348–349)

Rorty in this sense resists forms of radical quietism and praises 'the desire for ever-new, revisionary, extraordinary, paradoxical languages' (Rorty 2000: 349).²⁵ He can thus be seen as the inspiration for Brandom's metaphilosophical attitude. Brandom takes up this spirit to defend his curious semantic metaphilosophical approach. He sees himself as belonging to a group of systematic metaphysicians of which Sellars and Hegel are paradigmatic members. 'Each such systematic crafting, assembling, and deploying of expressive resources is an advance in understanding, as much where it fails as where it succeeds. Again, Hegel is a paradigm of a systematic metaphysician in this sense, as is Sellars' (Brandom 2003: 560).

Brandom identifies the positive attempt to create new vocabularies as one of the main traits differentiating Wittgenstein and Hegel – and, at least in this respect, he sides with the latter.²⁶ Within this metaphilosophical framework, where 'curiosity' is the basic attitude motivating exploration of semantic relations amongst vocabularies (as well as coining new ones), several of the problems that dogged McDowell do not seem equally central. For instance, the role of 'the obvious' is substantially resized as is the issue of its relation to philosophy: common-sense vocabulary is but one of the many vocabularies available to describe self and the world. Its 'obvious' character can be understood as connected to what happens to be unreflectively and unproblematically expressed by a given community at a certain time. As such, common-sense vocabulary neither has priority over other idioms nor holds special therapeutic value, and it can be a target vocabulary for metaphysically modest philosophical attempts to redescription.²⁷

However, other issues do arise. In particular, the assumption of *radical contingency* guiding the choice of which vocabulary to use as a base for expressing other target vocabularies might need a closer look. For instance, to the question 'Why privilege one vocabulary over others?' Brandom, in line with his definition of 'modest' metaphysics, maintains the choice is largely arbitrary, and he stresses that one should eventually avoid the question as philosophically irrelevant. 'Mostly, I'm completely uninterested in that question' (Brandom 2008b: 136). The answer is striking: for someone who advocates 'curiosity' as the basic attitude animating philosophy, it does not sound very 'curious'.

Brandom's account of his choice to adopt a *normative* vocabulary as the base idiom for capturing all rational discourse presents it as radically contingent if not arbitrary.²⁸ There is no particular reason for picking one vocabulary or another as the one in which 'everything can be said':

So we can just pick some vocabulary—for all I care, because it is Tuesday, we pick this as a base vocabulary, and see what that is expressed in other target vocabularies we can find a way to express in this base vocabulary. And then on Thursday, we pick another one, and see what we can express in its terms. Eventually we are going to know our way around better, mastering the relations between these different kinds of vocabularies, which cut across each other in various ways.

(Brandom 2008b: 137)

This idea that the starting point of philosophy is ultimately contingent – namely, that one can arbitrarily or randomly pick a vocabulary with which to begin one's

philosophical endeavour – is not neutral, especially if one is interested in finding a possible way to illuminate Hegel's thought. In fact, Hegel famously took a strong stance on the question of the origins of philosophy – or, in terms closer to Brandom's, on the starting point and method for developing new philosophical concepts – avowing the necessity of *Voraussetzungslosigkeit*, or the imperative of *presuppositionlessness* for any philosophical endeavour aiming to develop truly philosophical concepts. This, however, does not seem to coincide exactly with suggesting that such a beginning is *radically contingent* or *arbitrary*. Hegel does not appear to consider the philosophical vocabulary he is developing as simply *one amongst many* that could have been chosen arbitrarily.

This points to a deeper and more explicit opposition between Hegel's and Brandom's metaphilosophies, one that pertains to how they see the structure of their philosophical procedures. On the one hand, Hegel seems to think that starting from a presuppositionless beginning philosophy must arrive at its concept *developmentally*. The justification of such a vocabulary, for Hegel, results from the *necessity* guiding the unfolding of his developmental argument and does not seem to leave room for other, alternative idioms. On the other hand, unlike Hegel, Brandom thinks that understanding of a philosophical concept need not follow a developmental fashion.²⁹ Brandom himself acknowledges his disagreement with Hegel on this issue.

Hegel clearly takes it that the *only* way it is possible, in principle, to understand, specify, or convey logical or philosophical concepts is by rational reconstruction of an expressively progressive tradition of which they are the product. Both of the works in which he presents his systematic thought—the only two books he published during his lifetime—have this form. They are semantic genealogies of speculative logical concepts.

(Brandom 2005: 157)

Brandom does not share Hegel's affirmation of the necessity of situating philosophical concepts in a rational genealogy. He finds neither the construction nor the understanding of philosophical vocabulary as dependent on genealogical reconstructions or rational recollections. Rather, production of philosophical vocabulary, as he claims in several places, is a sort of 'conceptual engineering' (Brandom 1999: 1012; 2000a: 180; 2002: 116). This, according to Brandom, marks a relevant difference from Hegel:

I think that the logical concepts are different from ordinary empirical concepts (Hegel's 'determinate' concepts), since they get their content from their explicating role. I think it is possible to bypass the rehearsal of a path of development of their content and directly present the contents those concepts are taken to have at the end of Hegel's two books.

(Brandom 2002: 394, 40)

Such 'bypassing' is precisely what Brandom attempts in his book *Making it Explicit*, where he presents a pragmatic metalanguage to specify what a given expression makes explicit. 'I think it is possible in principle to say how we should think about discursive

practice according to the conceptual scheme in place at the end of the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, without having to rehearse the expository paths by which Hegel develops that scheme for us' (Brandom 2005: 160).

According to Brandom, it is logically possible to skip to the end of Hegel's work and present relevant concepts without having to deduce them. This is because Brandom's central notion for understanding the basic features of philosophical concepts is 'expression' (which I will not discuss here) – and 'expression' appears to be logically independent of the notions of 'reconstruction' or 'recollection', which do not appear to play a central role in his metaphilosophy.

For many scholars, Hegel's commitment to *development* of the philosophical concept is one of his foundational metaphilosophical commitments. At this point, one might ask what the cost of abandoning such a commitment would be. One cost of privileging non-developmental understanding of the task and motivation of philosophy is that it pushes historical considerations to the background. Justification of the attempt to develop a new vocabulary is not cast in terms of its relation with previous ones and does not refer to a narrative to legitimate itself. From this perspective, Rorty appears to make a stronger case for historicity than Brandom, since for Rorty 'the dialectical progress of the World-Spirit, correctly described by Hegel as the discovery of incoherence in any given way of making things hang together, followed by the formulation of an alternative way, the incoherence of which will be revealed a little later' (Rorty 2000: 348).

For Brandom this kind of developmental perspective does not apply to philosophical concepts,³⁰ leaving Hegel's idea of historical comprehension of philosophical systems playing only a secondary role in Brandom's metaphilosophy.

Conclusion

This preliminary survey of the neo-Hegelian metaphilosophies of the so-called Pittsburgh school has aimed to isolate some of their main ideas and to begin to situate them in relation to Hegel's metaphilosophical views.

The conceptions of philosophy advocated by McDowell and Brandom appear to have developed out of two main attitudes: a therapeutic stance regarding philosophical problems, in the case of McDowell, and a curious attitude, which translates into a version systematic metaphysics – expressed in semantic and 'modest' terms – in the case of Brandom.

As I have tried to show, McDowell's metaphilosophical views open up some questions regarding the 'obvious' status of some considerations, which might affect the role remembering them can play in the context of a therapeutic understanding of philosophy. The idea of appealing to something 'obvious' is problematic and also has been seen as a source of tension with Hegel's philosophy. On the other hand, I have tried to show that McDowell's idea of 'doing philosophy in traditional language' is less innocuous than McDowell may think and might call for more reflection on history and its role in determining the nature of philosophical problems. Further consideration of McDowell's implicit commitment to a historical understanding of philosophy is needed.

My reconstruction of Brandom's idea of a (modest) systematic metaphysics, understood in semantic terms, has aimed to show how his commitment to the radical contingency inhering in different vocabularies leads him away from one of Hegel's central metaphilosophical commitments, namely the necessarily developmental structure of arguments that are distinctly philosophical. On the one hand, Brandom's curiosity stops short of answering the important question of why we should privilege one vocabulary over another as the base for our modestly metaphysical project? Partly in opposition to his self-professed curiosity, Brandom claims to be 'completely uninterested' in this, while Hegel instead seems to have been more 'curious' about it. On the other hand, in his discussion of philosophical concepts, Brandom drops Hegel's metaphor of 'recollection' and instead embraces the metaphor of the philosophical 'engineer' who crafts various sorts of vocabularies.

Notes

- 1 This point has been made by Pinkard (2018).
- 2 This understanding of philosophy as an enterprise of crafting a (modest) metaphysical vocabulary guides Brandom's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*, as well as his account of Hegel's idea of philosophy as time comprehended in thought.
- 3 Of course, Rorty is one of the major inspirations (cf. McDowell 1994: xi; 2002: 101) but not the only one.
- 4 As we will see, the tension between these two stances has drawn much attention from Hegel scholars.
- 5 'Is not a label for a bit of constructive philosophy' (McDowell 1994: 96).
- 6 Distinction between the two is outlined in McDowell (2009a: 243, 365–366; 1998c).
- 7 For a literal interpretation of Wittgenstein's notion of 'discomfort', see Read and Hutchinson (2010).
- 8 If I read him correctly, McDowell seems to defend the Wittgensteinian idea that *global* quietism is wrong ('We do best not to take him to be making pronouncements about just anything that counts as philosophy' [McDowell 2009c: 367]). In terms of the question of the *scope* of quietism (are *all* philosophical questions to be dissolved? are there no genuine philosophical questions?), one way of making it compatible with some constructive views would be to argue that not all philosophical questions must be therapeutically dissolved, only *pointless* questions. This would leave room for some genuinely philosophical questions (Virvidiakis 2008).
- 9 On this, cf. Conant (2012).
- 10 The same point is found in McDowell (1998d: 58). 'So one's first move, if someone tries to interest one in a "How is it possible?" question, should be to ask: why exactly does it look to you, and why should it look to me, as if such-and-such a thing (e.g., baseless authority about oneself) is *not* possible?'
- 11 This complicates the analogy between questions and illnesses. Whereas illnesses manifest themselves *as* illnesses, as something that is *wrong* (through the emergence of symptoms, we recognize them immediately), philosophical questions do not appear as illness and might not immediately be recognized as such. Although this is an important point, I will not dwell on it here.

- 12 'Quietism does indeed urge us not to engage in certain supposed tasks, but precisely because it requires us to work at showing that they are not necessary. And it is indeed work. Therapeutic philosophy is designed to spare us the travails of positive philosophy, but it has its own difficulties' (McDowell 2009c: 370–371).
- 13 McDowell's so-called identity theory of truth is also one such reminder – to the point that McDowell refuses to call it a 'theory' (McDowell 2005). The identity approach, however, addresses the relation between thoughts and things. At a metaphilosophical level, it is not clear to what extent the idea of 'truth' applies to philosophical claims. In a sense, this is precisely the kind of question that an appeal to the obvious in this metaphilosophy seems to render compelling.
- 14 Such as 'The philosopher is someone who has to cure in himself many diseases of the understanding, before he can arrive at the notions of common sense' (Wittgenstein 1998: 50).
- 15 In various passages, Hegel suggests that *common sense* is a series of acquired prejudices that are neither true nor false but rather must be assessed in light of the results of philosophical analysis, which demonstratively proceeds independently of presuppositions: 'Jeder Mensch hat seine prämissen und Vorurtheile, d.h. in einer gewissen Zeit und Bildung gewisse Sätze die ihm gelten ... Grundsatz ist Vorurtheil, nicht Falsches, aber was fest im Menschen ist' (GW23.1, 295).
- 16 McDowell (2000a: 29).
- 17 Others share this worry, cf. Friedman (2002: 48) and Thornton (2004: 42).
- 18 For McDowell 'philosophy' in general seems to be the name not only for a pathology but also for some particular kinds of therapies.
- 19 'As I have put it, we need to exorcise the questions rather than set about answering them. Of course that takes hard work: if you like, constructive philosophy in another sense. And of course that is what I offer in this book' (McDowell 1994: xxiv).
- 20 'The moral of this book is also historicist' (Rorty 1979: 10).
- 21 In some passages, McDowell denies that philosophical problems are the same over history. 'The familiar supposed problems of modern epistemology are not just more of something that we already find in Plato. That would make it a mystery that two more millennia had to pass before philosophy began to be obsessed with the anxieties of Cartesian epistemology. It took something further and more specific to make what people wanted to think of as the target of their investigations threaten to withdraw out of reach of what they wanted to think of as their means of access to it. What figures in Plato as a distance between mere appearance and reality is not the distance that generates the characteristic anxiety of modern epistemology' (McDowell 2000c: 111).
- 22 Christoph Halbig voices some dissatisfaction with this way of understanding the history of philosophy: 'Much of the debate, however, is hampered by sweeping generalizations: modern philosophy since Descartes often appears to be a quasi-Heideggerian history of decline, in which philosophy gets more and more involved in self-created problems, until American pragmatism, Wittgenstein or whomever you choose for this role, puts an end to the pseudo-problem of realism' (Halbig 2005: 263).
- 23 This idea of 'metaphysics' is formulated in Brandom (2000b, 2008b, 2011, 2008a: Appendix). Brandom acknowledges the central role of semantics in his conception of philosophy: 'I tend to view the history of philosophy—not just of analytic philosophy, but also Kant and Hegel and their early modern ancestors—through semantic spectacles' (Brandom 2008a: 232).

- 24 Rorty is mentioned together with David Lewis as a main inspiration for such an attitude (Brandom 2002).
- 25 He sees such curiosity as 'the manic eros which gave us the Platonic dialogues, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," and *The Postcard*'. Cf. also Rorty (CIS: ch. 1).
- 26 'It is characteristic of his philosophical ambition that draws the opposite of Wittgenstein's conclusions from an appreciation of the dynamics of conceptual development and its sensitivity to arbitrary contingent features of the practitioners, devoting himself to elaborating what he insists is the *logic* of such processes and the conceptual contents they shape' (Brandom 2008a: 26).
- 27 This appears to be in line with some claims by Hegel stating that 'it is the privilege of philosophy to choose such expressions from the language of ordinary life' (SL, 628; WdL, GW12, 130). The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 28 Brandom's philosophical vocabulary notably contains basic terms that play an expressive role, including 'commitment', 'entitlement', 'material inference' and 'material incompatibility'. ('The enterprise – he tells us – is guided by the Wittgensteinian motto: "Don't look to the meaning, look to the use"' [Brandom 2008a: 4].)
- 29 A different story must be told for *determinate* concepts. I will not dwell on them here.
- 30 Although it does apply to *determinate* ones.

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Hegel's Metaphilosophy as Ascriptivist Metaphysics

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Introduction

Does Hegel have a metaphilosophy? If he does, what does his metaphilosophy consist in? Of course, Hegel has beliefs about what philosophy consists in, from an exoteric point of view (philosophy in the forewords and introductions)¹ as well as from an esoteric point of view (philosophy as part of absolute spirit). *Prima facie* one needs to take these views into account to make Hegel's metaphilosophy explicit. Now, if one is interested in fully grasping his system, especially his *Science of Logic* (from now on *SL*), these remarks are not that helpful. For, the esoteric position, on the one hand, presupposes an understanding of what his philosophy is all about and how it works. The exoteric position, on the other, might help in avoiding some misunderstandings. However, it does not help particularly if one wishes to understand what Hegel is doing exactly in his system and how he is doing what he is doing. But if this question is not answered adequately and if one is unhappy with expressions such as 'it is just the absolute that is explicating itself' or 'it is just the sum of different definitions of the absolute', more needs to be said on Hegel's metaphilosophy. To clarify Hegel's metaphilosophy we will present an understanding of doing metaphysics and propose that Hegel can be understood in this way.

By the term 'metaphilosophy', we mean what Hegel himself is doing in his philosophy. Such a clarification serves two aims, one exegetical and one systematic. Only if we are clear on how Hegel is philosophizing can we interpret his texts adequately (exegetical). Only if we know how he is doing what he is doing can we ourselves use this method to philosophize in a Hegelian manner today or evaluate his texts adequately (systematic). On the one hand, such a clarification need not necessarily be known by him – otherwise he might have made this clear to his readers as well. But on the other hand, such a clarifying reconstruction of Hegel's metaphilosophy should not contradict his own characterizations of what he is doing in his philosophy (at least not without very good reason).

In this chapter, we will argue that Hegel's metaphilosophy can be understood as, what we call, an ascriptivist metaphysics. To pursue that end, we proceed in four steps.

First, we introduce the term 'ascriptivist metaphysics'. Afterwards, we present two readings of Hegel's *SL* as an ascriptivist metaphysics. Then we present two additional metaphilosophical conceptions (and their main variants): philosophy as therapy and constructive philosophy. Furthermore, the relations between these metaphysical conceptions and ascriptivist metaphysics will be determined. Based on this we clarify in which sense Hegel's metaphilosophy can be understood as an ascriptivist metaphysics. In our concluding remarks, we explain in what sense and for which reasons Hegel's metaphilosophy should be regarded as an ascriptivist metaphysics. We will side with reading the *SL* as a kind of finite language game for the reasons we lay out further on.

One restriction must be mentioned directly at the beginning. Although in Hegel's own words classical categories of metaphysics are dealt with in his objective logic especially in the *Logic of Essence*, there are good reasons to believe that his whole system can be read as a metaphysics, consisting of his *SL*, a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of spirit. We will nevertheless, for this chapter's purposes, restrict ourselves to the *SL* in general, having especially the *Logic of Essence* in view.² But what is the *SL* all about? What is its subject matter? We think, as we try to argue, it is 'Hegel's claim to provide a systematic reconstruction of the implicit assumptions of common sense and to redeem its presumption of legitimacy' (Quante 2018b: 58). Such a reconstruction can and should be understood as being ascriptive. We therefore call Hegel's metaphilosophy an ascriptivist metaphysics.

Before explicating what exactly we mean by 'ascriptivist metaphysics' one last thing needs to be mentioned. The method Hegel followed³ and what he actually did in generating philosophical truths, on the one hand, and the way he expressed the result in form of the texts of the *SL*, on the other hand, must be distinguished. This is not to say that these are totally independent; quite the contrary, Hegel himself takes the latter to be part of the former. But to state this is, as we will argue, expressing that what he actually does is ascriptivist.

Ascriptivist metaphysics

What do we mean by 'ascriptivist metaphysics'? The term 'ascriptivism' was introduced into philosophical language by Peter Geach in his paper entitled 'Ascriptivism' (1960). Geach used the term to refer to a type of metaethical theory, back then a theory of the meaning of ethical expressions. Geach's conception of ascriptivism is based on H.L.A. Hart's paper 'The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights' (1948–1949). Hart's very idea was to analyse the concept of action as a kind of a defeasible concept, namely a concept *F* that does not have necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for something being an *F*. Instead, a concept *F* is analysed via our practice of ascribing that concept to entities and defeating such ascriptions. The concept of action is special in the sense that to say that someone did something, say Φ -ed, is not merely to describe what happened but to ascribe responsibility for that doing and/or its consequences. Therefore, Hart called sentences containing defeasible concepts ascriptive in meaning rather than descriptive. This implies that the truth conditions for ascriptive sentences are not exclusively dependent on purely descriptive facts.

This claim can come in different degrees that Hart unfortunately did not distinguish. A *weak* version of ascriptivism says that many action sentences are used not only to describe what happened but also to ascribe responsibility for what has been done. The *stronger* claim states that 'their principal function is what I venture to call *ascriptive*, being quite literally to ascribe responsibility for actions' (Hart 1951: 145). Finally, a *strong* reading says that all action sentences necessarily and exclusively function to ascribe responsibility.⁴ Ignoring this ambiguity a central feature of ascriptivism is that the ascriptive function of action sentences results in action concepts being analysed as 'defeasible concepts'. By this Hart meant concepts that have some *prima facie* conditions for application but can be defeated *secunda facie*. The methodological point is that defeating conditions are in part opaque but can be developed and that is the very reason why for Hart such concepts cannot be analysed as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions.⁵

The term 'ascriptivism' used in this sense is restricted to a theory of action, responsibility and defeasibility within the realm of legal philosophy. What then could an ascriptivist *metaphysics* be? First of all, we take metaphysics to be that philosophical enterprise dealing with the most basic phenomena and concepts of reality, including the 'structure of our thought about the world' (Strawson [1959] 2006: 9). Taken in a realistic way it is not limited to the structure of our thought about the world but includes also the structure of the world itself.⁶ In what sense then is such a realistic metaphysics ascriptive? 'Ascriptive' is a category similar to 'descriptive'. Usually metaphysics is taken to be a descriptive enterprise that only describes the structure of our thought of the world and/or the structure of the world.⁷ For claiming that a metaphysical approach is an ascriptivist one the defeasible character of certain concepts becomes decisive. Ascriptive metaphysics is meant to be the claim that metaphysical categories⁸ should be analysed as being defeasible concepts. All the categories Hegel analyses in his *SL* then have to be understood on a par with the concept of an action. To understand this, we have to take a closer look to what defeasible concepts are.

Defeasible concepts are, as already mentioned, concepts that have *prima facie* application conditions but whose application can be defeated by reference to certain criteria. These criteria can be understood as part of the semantics of a claim using a defeasible concept. The process of using a term in its default meaning and challenging this usage can be understood as one way of explicating the semantics of that concept. But insofar as metaphysics for Hegel is not only about our concepts of the world but about the world itself the question arises: how is this idea of defeasible concepts to be understood in such an approach? The trick is to take the usage of metaphysical language to be self-ascriptions aiming at making the structure of self-consciousness explicit. We are now able to define the concept of ascriptivist metaphysics:

A philosophy *P* is to be characterized as an ASRIPTIVIST METAPHYSICS *iff*:

- i. *P* consists in a conceptual explication of metaphysical categories ☞
- ii. Metaphysical categories are taken to be defeasible concepts ☞
- iii. The explication of these concepts consists in the process of ascribing and defeating (*default*☞*challenge*) ☞

- iv. This process (in case of metaphysical categories) itself is just the explication of oneself as a reasonable being.⁹

Hitherto we have merely proposed a certain understanding of what a philosophy characterized as ascriptivist metaphysics could consist in. This idea leaves many questions open of course especially how such a philosophy would look. In this chapter, we introduced this term to characterize Hegel's philosophy. Therefore, we stay agnostic at this point as to whether there are or might be other versions of ascriptivist metaphysics.

Now, the claim 'Philosophy consists in being an ascriptivist metaphysics' itself is a metaphilosophical claim. Therefore, Hegel's self-understanding of what his philosophy consists in, his metaphilosophy, has to be as analysed as ascriptivist metaphysics too. But what could this claim mean? Two different readings of our claim that Hegel's metaphilosophy should be understood as an ascriptivist metaphysics are possible. Let us take a look at these.

Two ascriptivist readings of Hegel's *Science of Logic*

First, we wish to discuss in what sense Hegel's *SL* can be understood as an ascriptivist metaphysics in general. This must not be confused with the question of how Hegel himself understood his *SL*. Two options seem to be available.

Either one takes seriously Hegel's claim that the *SL* consists in definitions of the Absolute ('the logical determinations in general, can be regarded as the definitions of the absolute' [EL, §85, 135]). In this case we propose reading the *SL* as an absolute *Sprachspiel*. Understood in this way 'the idea' is taken to be the absolute subject of self-ascriptions. Not that we as individual epistemic subjects are ascribing categories and defeating these ascriptions. Instead it is a super individualistic entity called the idea that is explicating itself by self-ascribing metaphysical categories. Metaphysics is just the project that is trying to make such self-explication of the idea explicit.

Alternatively, one understands the *SL* as a finite *Sprachspiel* and interprets the objective spirit as consisting of practices of self-ascriptions. This second reading incorporates the absolute spirit as well as the *SL* into the sphere of objective spirit.¹⁰ We as finite epistemic subjects are the ones that ascribe categories and defeat these ascriptions.

Before we now go into more detail, one last doubt must be addressed. Is there any evidence, one could ask, that Hegel's *SL* has anything to do with language games? It comes as no surprise that we think there is such evidence. Take for example the following line from the preface to the second edition of the *SL*:

But even when logical matters and their expressions are common coin in a culture, still, as I have said elsewhere, *what is familiar* is for that reason *not known*, and it can even be a source of irritation to have to occupy oneself with the familiar – and what could be more familiar than just those determinations of thought which we employ everywhere, and are on our lips in every sentence that we utter?

(*SL*, 13)

Of course, this passage primarily and critically deals with the relation between 'what is familiar' and what is 'known'. But it implies that in our speech about the world and ourselves, 'in every sentence that we utter', 'logical matters'¹¹ are already expressed. There are many more passages where Hegel expresses this claim, that we express metaphysical categories by our daily utterances.¹² What is important for now is simply to see that Hegel takes the connection to be very close between our common language games and the metaphysical categories being the objects of his *SL*. The next sections make explicit in what sense the *SL* itself consists in an explication of these presuppositions of our speech acts.

The Science of Logic as an Absolute *Sprachspiel*

This reading takes 'the Idea' to be the absolute Subject of self-ascription. As we already said ascriptivism as a type of metaphysics takes the explication of metaphysical content to be a process of ascribing and defeating metaphysically used concepts. Ascriptions can be understood as claims about the absolute, for 'the logical determinations in general, can be regarded as the definitions of the absolute' (EL, §85, 135). These claims, again, are to be understood as ascriptions/self-ascriptions because they are just instances of the self-explication of the idea itself.

Let's say the absolute subject itself is determining these logical determinations and thereby determining itself. This process of self-determination is therefore defining the absolute. Because the absolute subject is determining itself the form of ascription can be understood as self-ascription. Now this process of self-determination has an ascriptivist form. For, the evolution of these logical determinations is ruled by a dialectical structure. Each attempt to give itself its absolute determination, leads to a deficient mode of self-ascription. This deficiency is made explicit in the next step by defeating that very attempt of self-determination.

What might the absolute subject of self-ascription be? Hegel himself of course very often uses phrases of the form 'concept x itself does this and that', thereby taking concepts as actors. This seems to presuppose that the subject of ascriptive practices cannot be a finite individual. These claims, though backed by many passages in Hegel's writings, are, as such, neither very clear nor plausible.

Fortunately, an alternative reading is available. Hegel's talk of an absolute subject, of the Absolute as an actor doing things, should be interpreted as having the function of excluding wrong understandings of a metaphysics. In some passages, Hegel himself distinguishes between a subjective/epistemic and an absolute reading of the categorical development of the *SL*, as at the beginning of his *Logic of Essence*, where he repeats the movement from *being* to *essence*: 'When this movement is represented as a pathway of knowledge, this beginning with being and the subsequent advance which sublates being and arrives at essence as a mediated term appears to be an activity of cognition external to being and indifferent to its nature. But this course is the movement of being itself' (*SL*, 337).

This and all other very similar statements can be understood as remarks concerning the difference between an *internalistic* and an *externalistic* reading. The internalistic reading of the *SL* has to take all logical determinations to be dependent on our

knowledge, our epistemic perspective and would thereby be subjective in a problematic sense (resulting in scepticism). The externalistic reading instead, to secure objectivity, cannot explain how we finite beings could acquire knowledge about the metaphysical structure of the world (resulting in unjustifiable dogmatism). Therefore, Hegel chose these absolute-expressions to make clear that he intends both aspects (internal and external) to be incorporated into his metaphysics.¹³ This result can, as we will show now, be integrated into a reading of the *SL* as a finite language game.

The Science of Logic as a finite *Sprachspiel*

Hegel's whole philosophy builds on subjectivity as its core principle¹⁴ and we as self-conscious beings are its paradigm cases. The *SL* as a finite practice of speech then means that it (the *SL*) makes explicit the basic structure of reality we as finite subjects implicitly rely on in all our speech about us and the world, thereby presupposing its reality. This explication itself should be understood as a kind of ascription. Thus, the method of explication, 'the movement' in Hegel's own expression, consists in taking all metaphysical concepts to be defeasible ones the content of which will be presented via ascription and defeat.

This reading refers to objective spirit as the sphere that entails practices of self-ascription whereas we the individuals are the subjects of ascriptions and defeat. The whole *SL* and absolute spirit also are regarded as integral parts of objective spirit under this reading. But one could argue, objective spirit is about right. This incorporation then would mean that the *SL* as self-ascription takes place in the realm of social practices and especially in philosophy as a social practice.¹⁵

The *SL* explicates all ontological implications of our speech about ourselves and the world. Hegel tries to demonstrate that they are ontological implications of self-consciousness, which he takes to be the primary instance of intellectual intuition. But how can a theory that is about metaphysical structures of the world be worked out via finite speech acts? Is causation, for example, not a relation in the world? How can this be made explicit through ascriptivism? Hegel's answer is: we ourselves as self-conscious beings are realizations of metaphysical categories and the relation of causation is part of the ontology of self-consciousness.¹⁶ To make this idea a bit more explicit. *First*, metaphysical categories have realizations. *Second*, we too are realizations of metaphysical categories. For, we are realizations of self-consciousness and self-consciousness itself is a or, better, *the* metaphysical category.¹⁷

Constellations

From the very beginning of the evolution of German Idealism one distinction has been decisive, namely that between a finite self-conscious being and the transcendental self-consciousness, between a finite and the infinite I. This distinction has been interpreted differently by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.¹⁸ Hegel's understanding of the relation between self-consciousness as the structure of the absolute and finite self-conscious beings such as we are is of relevance for our analysis. Until now we have presented two optional readings of the *SL* as an ascriptivist metaphysics. The question of how to

relate these two readings echoes the question concerning the relation between finite and infinite I. Does the finite reading of the *SL* as being a finite language game exclude the absolute reading? Does it include the absolute reading? Or are both readings at least compatible with each other?

We hold that both readings are compatible. To vote for a finite reading, thus, is compatible with the absolute reading. Maybe Hegel himself argued for much stronger claims, namely that the *SL* is much more than just the result of finite practices of speech and their ontological presuppositions. But this 'more' must be integrated into the finite language games including the ontological presuppositions of our speech about ourselves and the world.

But so one could ask, how do you explain Hegel's claim of the inseparability of being and thinking? Ontological presuppositions of our speech about ourselves and the world, one could argue, do not ensure that they have some worldly counterpart. To answer this question, we introduce two readings of Hegel's philosophy as therapy and as constructive philosophy in the next section. Determining the relation between these two readings and ascriptivist metaphysics will help to clarify the questions concerning us and the world. This will be achieved by making plausible that some ideas concerning the distinction between us as epistemic subjects and the world as the external object presupposed in these worries should be rejected.

Hegel's ascriptivism and philosophy as therapy

Given these two options to read the *SL* as an ascriptivist metaphysics we will investigate their relation to another metaphilosophical characterization of Hegel's philosophy, namely as therapy. But, as will be shown, this understanding is closely related to the idea of a constructive philosophy. Additionally, the main subject matter of a philosophy partly constitutes the kind of metaphilosophy as well. So, we will propose that different types of metaphilosophy with regard to Hegel can be distinguished relatively to:

- *Ascriptivist vs Non-Ascriptivist*
- *Constructivist and Therapist*
- *The Good and The True*

In this part, we will argue in favour of a complex matrix of options concerning the relation between ascriptivism, philosophy as therapy and constructive philosophy. Again, let us begin with some terminology.

Two forms of therapeutic philosophy

What do we mean by 'therapy' in 'Philosophy as therapy'?¹⁹ We propose to distinguish between therapy in a narrow sense and therapy in a broad sense. For, if one understands philosophizing as a kind of therapy two types can be distinguished relative to certain sets of problems. Therapy in its very common usage is a means to solve a problem. There might be some problems that are generated by philosophy in the way that it has

been done for centuries. These 'homemade' problems (HMP for short), then, define a narrow set of philosophical problems. But there might be a widened set of problems including some problems having this characteristic: They arise outside of philosophy but can be dealt with within philosophy. Let's call this set of additional problems OP. Therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense deals with HMP and OP, therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense deals exclusively with HMP. These two versions of therapeutic philosophy can be characterized as follows:

1. Philosophy is understood as therapy *in the narrow sense* if its only task consists in curing people of misunderstandings brought about by philosophical mistakes (i.e. HMP). Its distinctive assumption is that only philosophically caused misunderstandings can be treated via philosophical treatment.
2. Philosophy is understood as therapy *in the broad sense* if (in addition to curing philosophical mistakes) its task is curing conceptual confusions to be found in common-sense beliefs as well as other belief systems (e.g. in science) which are pernicious for those who believe them (i.e. OP). Its specific function is to dislodge such harmful beliefs by philosophical argumentation or via induction of sceptical equipollence.

Both conceptions of philosophy as therapy share the idea that philosophy is primarily directed towards the practical goal of making the good life possible. These two metaphilosophical positions differ in their relation to different forms of constructive philosophy. Therefore, we will use the latter as a contrast to mark the difference between therapeutic philosophy in the broad and in the narrow sense. In the following we propose a fourfold distinction of constructive philosophy: a pejorative, a narrow, a broad and a revisionary sense.

Four forms of constructive philosophy

'Constructive philosophy' can denote both something positive and something negative. Contributing to a problem's solution is constructive in a positive sense, the proposed solutions and interpretations being constructed by philosophy. Such constructs can become sources of new problems and difficulties that would not have arisen at all if not for the original construction. Therefore, 'constructive' can be used in a pejorative sense, hinting at the problem-creating potential of philosophical solutions (especially if they are regarded as artificial, abstract or even counterintuitive).

Constructive Philosophy in the Pejorative Sense relies on a conception of therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense. Thus, 'constructive philosophy' stands for taking philosophical misunderstandings (i.e. HMP) erroneously as being real problems in need of philosophical solutions. Insofar as these philosophical misunderstandings themselves are products of 'construction', constructive philosophy in the pejorative sense is the cause of all philosophical problems. That is what makes this use of 'constructive philosophy' pejorative. Therefore, this pejorative meaning of 'constructive' presupposes the perspective of therapeutic philosophy

Constructive Philosophy in the Narrow Sense aspires to deliver solutions for real problems (i.e. OP) as contribution to the good life. If one identifies the ambition and

object of philosophy as such with therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense, then therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense corresponds to constructive philosophy in the narrow sense. Also, therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense as such is a constituent of a conception of philosophical therapy in the broad sense.²⁰ So understood, this narrow conception of constructive philosophy also aims at solving HMP.

Constructive Philosophy in the Broad Sense rejects the equation of philosophy as such with therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense. It strives for delivering philosophical justification and systematization for implicit presumptions and claims found in common sense or science, thereby bringing these into accordance with philosophical standards (let's call these philosophical solutions departing from and justifying the common sense PS_{cs}). Constructive philosophy in the broad sense cannot be restricted to the models of philosophy as therapy although it shares the premise to use common sense as a reliable point of departure with them.

Constructive Philosophy in a Revisionary Sense generally mistrusts common-sense assumptions and aims to replace²¹ these by philosophically justified beliefs (let's call these philosophical solutions replacing common sense PS_{ncs}).²² As constructive philosophy in the broad sense it rejects the equation of philosophy as such with therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense. The decisive difference between them is that revisionary constructive philosophy no longer accepts common sense as a point of departure or as a condition of adequacy. Finally, there are two different possible tasks of philosophy. For, at least therapeutic philosophy primarily aims at *the Good* whereas the primary aim of other types of philosophy is *the True*.

We sum up our results so far in Table 23.1.

Table 23.1 Metaphilosophical Options

	Primary Task of Philosophy	Extension of the Object of Philosophy	Status of Common Sense [and Function]	Relations amongst Conceptions
Therapeutic Narrow	The Good	HMP	Basis [Repair HMP]	Presupposes a pejorative understanding of constructive philosophy
Therapeutic Broad	The Good	HMP & OP	Basis [Repair HMP Cure OP]	Corresponds to narrow constructive philosophy
Constructive Pejorative	The Good/ The True	HMP	Basis [Create HMP]	Derives from narrow therapeutic philosophy
Constructive Narrow	The Good	HMP & OP	Basis [Repair HMP Cure OP]	Corresponds to broad therapeutic philosophy
Constructive Broad	The True	PS_{cs}	Basis [To be integrated Partial revision]	Partial overlap with therapeutic philosophy and revisionary constructive philosophy
Constructive Revisionary	The True	PS_{ncs}	Error [To be replaced Elimination]	Partial overlap with broad constructive philosophy

Ascriptivist metaphysics and therapeutic philosophy

How do these variants of therapeutic philosophy relate to ascriptivist metaphysics (in its two readings)? Let us distinguish the function of ascriptivism and of therapeutic philosophy to make plausible our claim that both are logically independent. Ascriptivism expresses the 'how', therapy instead concerns 'aim and purpose' of a metaphilosophy. So understood, both 'ascriptivism' and 'therapy' denote different possible aspects of a metaphilosophy. Being logically independent does not exclude the option that there might be some determinate relations between them which are philosophically illuminating. To clarify this, our distinction between absolute and finite ascriptivist metaphysics is helpful.

We have listed six variants above (see Table 23.1). In a first step we can reduce this to four options. Since therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense presupposes an understanding of constructive philosophy in the pejorative sense given the features, we are interested in we can check their relation to ascriptivist metaphysics together. Also, therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense and constructive philosophy in the narrow sense can be taken together in our proof for the same reason. So, we are left with these four options:

- therapeutic philosophy narrow/constructive philosophy pejorative (A)
- therapeutic philosophy broad/constructive philosophy narrow (B)
- constructive philosophy broad (C)
- constructive philosophy revisionary (D)

These four options have to be related to these three metaphilosophical conceptions:

- non-ascriptivism (denial of ascriptivism in both forms) (1)
- ascriptivism finite (2)
- ascriptivism infinite (3)

Taken together we get these twelve combinations, see Table 23.2.²³

To discuss these combinations, we will proceed in three steps, where the first two steps are meant to reduce the complexity. The *first* step deals with inconsistent combinations we refer to with '#'. The *second* step concerns plausibility of the combination as an interpretation of Hegel (therefore, 'H-implausible'). The *third* step consists in an assessment of the remaining six options.

Table 23.2 Metaphilosophical Matrix of Combinations

	A	B	C	D
1	H-implausible	H-implausible		
2	H-implausible			#
3	#	#		

Step 1: Logical consistency

Three options are impossible: A and B exclude infinite ascriptivism as their partner since the latter deals with PS_{ncs} violating the limitations of extension given for A and B.²⁴ Conversely D2 excludes finite ascriptivism due to extension restrictions. All D-options opt against PS_{cs} , whereas finite ascriptivism holds PS_{cs} exactly. Therefore, the combinations A3, B3 and D2 are inconsistent, which we indicate by '#'. Nine combinations are still left.

Step 2: Plausible interpretation of Hegel's SL

In a second step we can exclude further combinations since they are obviously not plausible interpretation hypotheses of Hegel's writings (we name this criterion 'H-implausible'). Given Hegel's arguments and remarks concerning his method (including the metaphilosophical ones) and given the questions and problems he deals with in the *SL* the conception of therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense (A) as such is implausible, for, the programme of the *SL* cannot be restricted to HMP only.²⁵ For this reason, both (A1) and (A2) are H-implausible. But even reading the *SL* as a therapeutic philosophy in the broad sense is H-implausible if combined with non-ascriptivism (B1). If Hegel's arguments are taken to be a descriptive metaphysics (analysing metaphysical entities and their features in a purely descriptive manner) it is evident that he is not limiting himself to HMP and OP (B1) or to the Good as the primary task of doing philosophy.²⁶

Step 3: Assessing the remaining options

To evaluate the six remaining options further criteria are needed. We will base our evaluation on these three criteria:

- backed by some of Hegel's statements (cr-1)
- systematically plausible (relative to interpreter's own premises) (cr-2)
- systematically plausible (relative to interpreter's own cognitive interests) (cr-3)

We have to assess one variant of B, all variants of C and two variants of D; we will do this now using the three criteria just mentioned. Before we proceed a few remarks concerning our three criteria are in order. Concerning cr-1 we restrict Hegel's statements to his *SL* (including the exoteric parts of these such as introductions, etc.). Cr-2 covers the philosophical and metaphilosophical premises an interpreter invests in interpreting Hegel's philosophical arguments as philosophical arguments. Finally, cr-3 includes primarily the following two: developing a systematically plausible interpretation of Hegel's philosophy and taking Hegel as a valuable model to develop a systematically plausible philosophical theory oneself. As is evident cr-3 is dependent on cr-2 at least to some degree, but cr-2 should not depend (at least solely) on cr-3. In the following we will try to make explicit how we have used these three criteria.

We will start with the option of understanding Hegel's conception as a version of revisionary constructive philosophy (i.e. D1 and D3). Very often this is suggested to establish that Hegel's philosophy is meaningless talk, philosophical nonsense or philosophically extravagant. In this vein the label is very similar to the pejorative use of constructive philosophy.²⁷ Therefore, it is important to note that our definition of the latter is restricted to the metaphilosophical position of therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense. But most of those who have formulated this critique didn't commit themselves to the metaphysical position known as therapeutic philosophy in the narrow sense. Sometimes this negative judgement is framed in historical phrases claiming that today one can no longer defend such strong metaphysical claims as Hegel did.²⁸ Without making explicit for which justified reasons we today are on the right side, this is no argument at all. Concerning Hegel's text, one has to admit that such a reading as revisionary constructive philosophy fits many of these statements, so our first criterion is met at least to a certain degree. Besides the fact that these statements very often are not very clear, they also do not fit very well to what Hegel is doing in his philosophy. The closer it comes to the analysis of real phenomena (especially those he deals with in his philosophy of mind) the greater is the tension between the realistic spirit of Hegel's analyses and these programmatic metaphysical claims. Furthermore, we have to confess that option D is neither compatible with our own premises (cr-2) nor our own cognitive interests (cr-3). Since this is true of both variants, D1 and D3, we conclude that option D is not the most plausible one in terms of Hegel's texts, on the one hand, and is burdened with the fact that we neither see how to justify revisionary metaphysical projects in general nor the specific version Hegel is told to have delivered, on the other.

Although option C, interpreting Hegel's philosophy as constructive in the broad sense, is consistent in all three variants, our evaluation of C3 comes to the same conclusion and for the same reasons. There is some evidence in his texts for Hegel trying to analyse an infinite language game (the idea talking to itself), but such an approach doesn't fit our cr-2 and cr-3 (for reasons not specific to questions concerning Hegel research). Thus, we conclude that option C3 also is not the most plausible one in terms of Hegel's texts, on the one hand, and is burdened with the fact that we neither see how to analyse an infinite language game (*we as finite beings* cannot handle) in general nor the specific version Hegel is told to have delivered, on the other.

If it comes to the evaluation of C1 and C2 our evaluation comes to a less clear result. On the one hand, we agree that there is a lot to be found in Hegel's texts, especially in his *SL*, which suggests to understand it as a version of non-ascriptivist constructive philosophy in the broad sense (C1). If we ignore those who ascribe Hegel to be a revisionary constructive philosopher (mostly with the intention to get rid of him) interpreting Hegel's philosophy as a special version of C1 surely is the most common position up to now. Doing this commits one not to take very seriously his model that the absolute is realizing itself throughout cognitive processes and social practices. Why is that? Well, C1 commits one to a non-ascriptivist reading of Hegel. The problem is that Hegel's action-theoretic talk of the absolute realizing itself cannot be accounted for from such a non-ascriptivist perspective. Instead action-theoretic vocabulary in the

logic must be interpreted as a mere *façon de parler*. At least one has to ignore that this specific feature is of systematic relevance for interpretation and systematic reasons. But for sure this option is one to be taken very seriously in any interpretation of Hegel's *SL* and overall metaphysical system.

Although it might seem that C1 has strong backing in Hegel's text, such a non-ascriptivist reading bears the explanatory problems we just mentioned. Therefore, we think that it is a more attractive strategy to understand Hegel's philosophy as a version of C2, namely a constructive philosophy in the broad sense mainly organizing metaphysical claims as ascriptions realized in our finite language games (as described above).²⁹ Such an ascriptivist reading can take Hegel's use of action-theoretic vocabulary seriously and explain it. We explicitly want to admit that this conclusion is motivated by our own premises (cr-2), especially our scepticism that a reasonable reconstruction of Hegel's metaphilosophy can be delivered without taking the ascriptive aspects of his organizing his philosophy as the absolute's self-realizing process into account. Since we are not interested in delivering an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy that we ourselves take to be implausible (our cr-3) we favour version C2 instead of C1 giving cr-2 and cr-3 more weight than c-1.³⁰

Finally, let us examine B2, which takes Hegel's philosophy to be therapeutic philosophy in a broad sense done via analysing our finite language games in an ascriptive manner. This reading has as strong a basis in his texts as option C1 does (the more the focus is on his philosophy of mind the stronger this backing becomes, but it is a clear trace in *SL* too).³¹ Furthermore, it is very close to our own philosophical and metaphilosophical premises (cr-2) and, as a consequence, fulfils our cognitive interests in delivering an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy to a very high degree (cr-3).³² We should have in mind that B2 integrates aspects of therapeutic and constructive philosophy, on the one hand, and that reading it as ascriptive metaphysics dealing with our finite language games allows us to systematically take into account the way Hegel himself has presented his metaphilosophy and his philosophical system, on the other. But in contrast to (C), it has the Good as its primary aim. Taken together, we come to the conclusion that there are at least three metaphilosophical paths one can follow with good (but divergent) reasons in trying to understand Hegel's philosophy, including his metaphilosophical approach: C1, C2 and B2.

Concluding remarks

If one were forced to subsume Hegel's metaphilosophy under one label, we would side with C2. It seems obvious to us that Hegel's metaphysics does not amount to nothing more than promoting the good, which is constitutive of all B-variants. Instead, the very last aim of philosophy consists in the true.³³ There are also many passages especially in the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* where Hegel explicitly takes common sense to be a form of expressing the truth even if not in the adequate form. This shows, *first*, that Hegel does not take common sense to be in need of replacement and, *second*, that Hegel nevertheless took common sense to bear possibilities of problems that are in need of philosophical therapy. But more important, there are HMP for Hegel that are

in need of therapy. For this purpose, philosophy must be in part revisionary, meaning that it revises habitualized terminology, formulations of philosophical problems and questions.³⁴ These are our reasons for holding C.

Concerning the non-ascriptive/ascriptive-distinction we deny C1 for the explanatory problems we already mentioned. Many passages of the *SL* entailing actions of the concept or the absolute are in need of explanation that can hardly be given by a non-ascriptive reading. Within the two ascriptive readings we side with the finite reading for a similar reason. Although the infinite reading can make sense of the action-theoretic vocabulary within the *SL*, it still struggles with the question of how to understand that infinite subject realizing these actions.

Of course, subsuming a historical author's work under categories developed in classification systems is always a difficult task. Almost no author realizes one theory-type perfectly or exclusively. Asking whether Hegel's philosophy should be interpreted as ascriptivist metaphysics, therapeutic or constructive philosophy therefore cannot deliver simple answers. This is especially the case if the categories in use are neither the author's own nor simple or independent from each other. So, it comes as no surprise that our conclusion is not a simple one, identifying one option as the only possible candidate. Furthermore, one has to accept and try to make explicit that every suggestion has to rely on further criteria (as the three we used ourselves here) which steer the interpretation but are external ones. On the one hand, this accepts that there is no pure hermeneutics in philosophy. On the other hand, it is a very strong argument for a pluralistic account – in our case in Hegel research. Given our divergent premises and cognitive interests and taking into account that Hegel's philosophy is complex and multifaceted there is no alternative to accepting alternatives here. The options identified can and should be worked out as clearly and in as much detail as possible. Doing this might bring about two important results: a better understanding of what Hegel has delivered us and more metaphilosophical options than those we have at hand to start such an exegetical enterprise at all. Seen from this perspective our attempt can be regarded as an integral part of the attempt to take Hegel seriously as a strong and vivid partner in our current philosophical dialogues.³⁵

Notes

- 1 For this understanding of philosophy, see Fulda (1984); Hegel himself uses the term 'exoteric' to refer to preliminary remarks in the preface to the second edition of his *Encyclopaedia* (1827): 'In this new edition, the reader (if he is motivated to look for such things) will find several parts reworked and developed into more precise determinations. I was concerned in this edition with moderating and lessening the formal character of the presentation by, among other things, using more expansive, exoteric remarks to bring the abstract concepts closer to ordinary understanding and a more concrete representation of them' (EL, 8; the *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation).
- 2 This restriction is motivated by three reasons: *first*, a discussion of the whole system would have been too extensive for a single chapter, *second*, we believe, the *SL* and

especially the Logic of Essence entails strong evidence for the reading, and *third*, we avoid the misunderstanding that we are only thinking about objective spirit.

- 3 For those being sceptic that Hegel himself would have ever talked of himself using or following a method see: 'the method that I follow in this system of logic' (SL, 33; the *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation).
- 4 Supposedly this last strong reading leads Geach to his objection against ascriptivism as a non-cognitivist enterprise. For a more thorough discussion, see Quante (2013) and Meyer and Quante (2016).
- 5 For defeasibility in philosophy, see Blöser et al. (2013).
- 6 Hegel claims in his *SL* not to deal with the semantics of metaphysical language or transcendental conditions of experience only, but to analyse also the very structure of reality itself. 'Pure science ... contains *thought in so far as this thought is equally the fact as it is in itself*; or the *fact in itself* in so far as this is *equally pure thought*. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness as it develops itself and has the shape of the self, so that *that which exists in and for itself is the conscious concept and the concept as such is that which exists in and for itself*. This objective thinking is thus the *content* of pure science' (SL, 29). For understanding the relation between 'thought' and 'the fact in itself' as that between 'language' and 'nonlinguistic reality', see also Hartnack (1998: 6).
- 7 By 'descriptive' and accordingly 'descriptivism' we mean something different than Corti (2016). Corti distinguishes 'descriptivism' and 'reconstructivism' as two different kinds to understand how the different parts of Hegel's system, especially the different phenomena of subjective spirit, are related to each other, whether Hegel describes them as separable entities or reconstructs them as layers of different realizations of cognition in degree.
- 8 By a metaphysical category we mean a term that is used to make a metaphysical statement. Therefore, there are not necessarily metaphysical terms per se, but there is a metaphysical use of them. We could then understand a metaphysical category as the metaphysical use of a term. This leaves open the question of (1) whether all terms can be used metaphysically, and (2) whether there are terms that can only be used metaphysically.
- 9 So understood even reading Hegel's philosophy of nature and of spirit as metaphysics might become plausible.
- 10 This reading follows the interpretation common amongst the Young (or Left) Hegelians; compare the contributions in Quante (2010) and Quante and Mohseni (2015).
- 11 By this Hegel means what we call metaphysical categories, which must not be confused with terms of a system of formal logics.
- 12 For example, in the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia*: 'In our ordinary consciousness, thoughts are clothed in and combined with familiar sensuous and spiritual material, and when we think things over, reflect, or reason about them, we intermingle our feelings, intuitions, and representations with thoughts (in every sentence with a quite sensuous content – as for instance in "This leaf is green" –, categories such as *being*, *singularity* are already part of the mix)' (EL, §3 R, 31).
- 13 For the claim of this combination in terms of 'ontology' and 'epistemology', see Illetterati (2018).
- 14 The most famous citation for this claim, of course, is that in the preface of the *Phenomenology*: 'In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as

- Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (PS, 9–10; the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted to Miller's translation).
- 15 For the relation between philosophy and the philosophy of right, see Fulda (1968); for philosophy as an institution, see Meyer (2018).
 - 16 Hegel's Logic of Essence, especially the Logic of 'Essence and Reflection Within' (Schein) unfolds this ontology of self-consciousness. For a thorough interpretation of the Logic of Essence and Appearance and an argument for this claim, see Quante (2018a); cf. Halbig and Quante (2000: 95).
 - 17 This claim has similarity with Paul Redding's reading in Redding (2020).
 - 18 For a reconstruction of the different readings, see Halbig and Quante (2000).
 - 19 For the following distinctions we rely on Quante (2018b: 50–53).
 - 20 This is why in a conception of philosophy as therapy in the broad sense using the term 'constructive philosophy' in both a pejorative and a narrow sense suggests itself.
 - 21 Replacement and departure differ in that sense that departure takes common sense to be correct in principle but in need of consistent explication. Of course, consistent explication might lead to denial of parts of common sense.
 - 22 Revisionary constructive philosophy can even be seen as an extreme version of therapeutic philosophy. If common sense as such is regarded as a problem for the good life, its replacement by a philosophical system becomes a form of therapy. We will ignore this special variant in the following.
 - 23 We will explain 'H-implausible' and '#' in what follows. The empty boxes are those plausible combinations we discuss in the third step.
 - 24 That infinite ascriptivism holds PS_{ncs} immediately follows from the fact that it takes the linguistic form of the *SL* to be the most adequate one for solving philosophical problems. But it is obvious that the linguistic form of the *SL* denies common sense as the primary and main linguistic form of expressing and solving philosophical problems.
 - 25 We take the preface to the first edition of the *SL* to be sufficient for showing that Hegel responds to philosophical problems as real philosophical problems and not mere HMP.
 - 26 If one thinks that Hegel in fact restricts himself to such a task, we think she would be committed to an ascriptivist reading of the *SL*.
 - 27 It must be noted that they do not equate to each other. For, a revisionary metaphysics must not necessarily be understood as constructing HMP. There might be a tendency, though, of revisionary metaphysics to collapse into constructive philosophy in the pejorative sense.
 - 28 For many, see Honneth (2014: 3).
 - 29 Recall that finite ascriptivism analyses metaphysical concepts via their functioning in ascriptions by extracting their meaning in a default and challenge structure. Of course, in Hegel's *SL* this analysis is brought into a methodological order and in a purified manner. That is, Hegel of course does not analyse everyday speech acts.
 - 30 We think this is justified as long as both versions do have backing in Hegel's texts to sufficient degree (as we think C1 and C2 both do). Given this we suggest to give cr-2 and cr-3 more weight than a slightly better backing (cr-1). Our main argument is that this higher backing is weakened by the 'fact' that the plausibility of what we gain in that interpretation (C1) is much lesser than in (C2). But this argument itself is influenced by our criteria cr-2 and cr-3 and cannot be taken as an independent one. For such an emphasis for cr-2 and cr-3 concerning finite and infinite talk in Hegel with different terminology, see Habermas (2019: IX, 523, n. 72).

- 31 We nevertheless take C2 to be stronger evidenced better than B2 and C1.
- 32 This is an effect of cr-3 being strengthened by cr-2, for sure.
- 33 Again in place of many passages the preface of the *Phenomenology*: 'In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (PS, 9–10).
- 34 For a very good study about one passage that entails such a kind of therapy, see Wolff (1992).
- 35 We thank Anna Blundell and an anonymous referee for helpful corrections and comments.

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‘A Temple without a Holy of Holies’: The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel’s Metaphysics

Elena Tripaldi

The many lives of Hegel: Metaphysical, post-Kantian and ‘revised-metaphysical’

In the first preface to his *Science of Logic*, Hegel considers the aftermath of what he calls the ‘complete transformation that the ways of philosophical thought have undergone ... in the past twenty-five odd years’ (SL, 7).¹ The expression clearly refers to the revolution initiated by Kant’s philosophy. Hegel notes how the transcendental turn ‘extirpated root and branch’ the kind of knowledge known as metaphysics, making it vanish ‘from the ranks of the sciences’ (EL, §38 R).² This granted the appreciation of our finite, contingent and earthly experience: now that the typically metaphysical belief of some higher truth lying beyond the world was refuted, mundane reality no longer appeared as a land of ‘darkness,’ devoid of the light of truth and right. It could now be considered in all of its glory: ‘And so this darkness ... having been dispelled, existence shone transformed into the bright world of flowers – of which, as is well known, none is *black*’ (SL, 8).

In a similar vein, in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel praises the Second Position of Thought towards Objectivity – comprising critical philosophy and empiricism: ‘There lies in empiricism this great principle that what is true must exist in actuality and be there for perception. This principle is opposed to the *ought*, with which reflection inflates itself and looks down on actuality and the present in the name of a *beyond*’ (SL, 7).

Yet, alongside these enthusiastic remarks more ambiguous ones are found in the ‘Preface,’ such as: ‘With science and common sense thus working hand in hand to cause the downfall of metaphysics, the singular spectacle came into view of a *cultivated people without metaphysics* – like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies’ (SL, 8).

Is this a positive statement, signifying that modernity, through Kantian philosophy in particular, finally broke free from the mirage of the traditional metaphysical presupposition of a transcendent truth, enjoying the multiple, colourful and contingent aspects of life and thereby diversifying its spiritual activities, as many ‘rich ornaments’?

Or is this a negative consideration, implying that modern life is lacking something fundamental, which was provided by metaphysics?

Up until the 1970s, Hegel's philosophy was in Anglo-American literature commonly considered as an extremely traditional, theologically driven metaphysics.³ Hegel would have attempted to restore traditional metaphysics, refusing the Kantian critique of metaphysics.⁴ He was considered a proponent of a form of neo-Platonism, claiming that the whole of reality was a manifestation of the Absolute Spirit as God's freely and self-creating activity.⁵ In this sense, one could claim that the 'traditional metaphysical view' would read Hegel's comparison of the modern age to a temple 'without a holy of holies' as a negative remark, pointing to the need to reclaim the kind of metaphysics Kantian philosophy had dismissed. Yet, this reading does not take into account Hegel's enthusiastic consideration of the 'complete transformation that the ways of philosophical thought have undergone'. It seems undeniable that Hegel attributed to Kant's philosophy the merit of breaking free from a world view that he considered unsatisfactory.

Since the publication of *Hegel's Idealism*, Robert Pippin has set himself the task of giving proper recognition to Hegel's praise of Kant's philosophy.⁶ This has also allowed him to discover the contemporary relevance of Hegel's position, whereas the traditional metaphysical view insisted on affirming the outdatedness of Hegel's thought.⁷ Pippin's reading presents Hegel's philosophy as a continuation and a radicalization of Kant's, claiming that through this endeavour it is characterized as a 'conceptual scheme idealism'.⁸ With this expression, Pippin compares Hegel's understanding of objectivity and thought to the contemporary conception of thought as a 'conceptual scheme' and, more specifically, to the one underlying internal realism. This was only made possible by a complex mediation in the history of concepts. Amongst contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, Kant has been seen as the first expression of the ambiguity at the core of the realism-anti-realism debate: in the Transcendental Deduction, he seemed to posit the dependency of objectivity on conceptual distinctions, thereby rendering objectivity entirely independent of experience; yet, he insisted that objectivity needed a criterion external to thought as well, claiming that 'Thoughts without content are empty' (Kant 1998: 193, B 75/A 51).⁹ From this perspective, Kant left his successors with two unresolved questions: one regarding the relationship between thought's conceptual scheme and its content, and one regarding the question of how objectivity can be accounted for as something independent from experience while avoiding solipsism and relativism. Hence, Pippin reads Hegel's philosophy as a resolution of these tensions. Pippin's interpretation is based on two claims. First, according to this understanding of Hegel there are some fundamental concepts that, similarly to Kant's 'pure concepts', regulate and determine any kind of possible experience.¹⁰ Second, the study of these fundamental concepts would coincide with the study of the essential, unavoidable structure of reality – at least insofar as it is conceivable for us.¹¹ According to Pippin, Hegel's strategy is twofold. First of all, Hegel sets out to criticize any conception of truth and knowledge that presupposes that the criterion for objectivity would be outside and independent from knowledge itself. These are realism, which presupposes that reality is external to thought, and metaphysics, which presumes that our knowledge of reality could be independent of the structures that constitute the subject's apperceptive act. Hegel reduces these perspectives on knowledge and truth *ad*

absurdum.¹² This *reductio* demonstrates that there is no other possible conception of objectivity than as something dependent on fundamental conceptual discriminations made by thought within itself. In this sense, the exposition of the conceptual structures of thought in Hegel becomes a new form of metaphysics – according to Pippin the only one possible after Kant's Transcendental Deduction. This is the second step of Hegel's strategy, as expounded in the Subjective Logic. 'This is Hegel's chief metaphysical point ... The most expansive summary of such claims is that the forms of judgement, the forms of thought, are the form of things, of objects and events' (Pippin 2015: 168).¹³

In Pippin's perspective, then, Hegel's comparison of modernity to a 'temple without a holy of holies' could be read as a positive statement, saluting the liberating acknowledgement that there is no transcendent authority to which our experience should submit. Hegel praised Kant's abandonment of metaphysics and sets out in his *Logic* to complete it, demonstrating the self-refuting character of metaphysical beliefs, so that the missing of the 'holy of holies' would no longer be perceived as a lack anymore.

Such an enterprise [the *Logic*'s] is to be distinguished from traditional ... metaphysics, since the latter treats the objects of thought ... as substances ... beyond or transcending finite particulars, whereas Hegelian ... 'speculative philosophy' has succeeded in thinking of traditional substance as 'subject' and by doing so has completely rejected any notion of the metaphysically real beyond, or behind, or 'more real' than can be understood in 'spirit's experience of itself' or, now, by 'thought's examination of itself'.

(Pippin 1989: 175)

But if Pippin is right, why did Hegel refer to a 'lack' in the first place, comparing the modern age to a 'temple *without* a holy of holies'?¹⁴

Amongst those dissatisfied with Pippin's solution, claiming that Hegel was in some respect unhappy with Kant's transcendental turn, are the so-called revised metaphysical interpreters.¹⁵ These interpreters present very different interpretations of Hegelian metaphysics, yet they all agree with the claim that Hegel's engagement in continuing and realizing the implications of Kant's philosophy entailed a stronger metaphysical commitment than Pippin would claim. More specifically, the common thread in these readings is that the accomplishment of Kant's critical enterprise implies the identification of Hegel's *Logic* with a proper ontology.

Just as for Pippin, Hegel's continuity with Kant allows revised metaphysical interpreters to claim the contemporary relevance of Hegel's thought. The 'revised metaphysical view', namely, claims the affinity of Hegel's metaphysics to contemporary analytic metaphysics. The root of this analogy is made explicit by James Kreines and consists in the presumed refusal of one of the tasks associated with traditional metaphysics, that is, the monistic endeavour to individuate the one, single principle or structure grounding all reality.

I argue that Hegel rejects rational monism ... He holds that there is no single ground providing a complete reason for everything real, not even in the whole of everything ... Hegel rejects a form of metaphysics that Kant was especially

concerned to criticize ... All this is compatible with recognition that Hegel's project remains ambitiously metaphysical ... Hegel argues that reality itself has the structure of a hierarchy of levels.

(Kreines 2008: 50)

This objective, which is usually associated by revised metaphysical interpreters and contemporary analytic metaphysicians with the fallacy of Spinozism, is excluded by contemporary analytic metaphysics in compliance with Quine's restriction of the domain of metaphysics to the ontological inquiry into 'what is'.¹⁶ Analogously, according to 'revised metaphysical interpreters', Hegel would have limited the scope of his *Logic* to a classification of the fundamental ontological structures of 'what is' because he welcomed Kant's critique of the *metaphysica specialis*, refusing to dedicate attention to transcendent objects such as God, the world or the soul.¹⁷ Just as Pippin, 'revised metaphysical' interpreters' claim that getting rid of *metaphysica specialis*' concern with one single absolutely fundamental principle of reality allows for the appreciation of contingent aspects of reality, as well as for the subjective component of our experience.

This sort of monism is precisely what we do not find in Hegel's account of this level of nature ... Hegel's claim here is not that we find something substantial in the whole, rather something ... goes missing entirely. In fact, Hegel refers to this result as a kind of 'contradiction' inherent in this level of reality.

(Kreines 2008: 60)¹⁸

This approach still differs from traditional metaphysics ... It is the structure of thought and experience around which our inquiries turn, thereby avoiding problematic claims about a priori insight into being as such.

(Stern 2009: 19)

According to the 'revised metaphysical interpreters', then, the comparison of modernity to a 'temple without a holy of holies' is both negative and positive: some objectives and beliefs of traditional metaphysics need to be abandoned to fully appreciate and understand reality.

The Kantian study of the transcendental categories constituting objectivity, though, is not enough: the modern age needs its own ontology – and the task of Hegel's *Logic* is to provide it. Weighing this interpretive option requires, first of all, determining how Hegel understood traditional metaphysics and, secondly, what a desirable accomplishment and radicalization of Kant's philosophy for him would look like.

With or without you? Hegel's relationship to traditional metaphysics and to Kant's transcendental turn

Hegel's view of metaphysics is decidedly ambiguous. Whereas Hegel during his Jena period considered metaphysics as an actual discipline in his system, and defined it as 'proper philosophy' (GW5, 274),¹⁹ in his mature system metaphysics was demoted

to the discussion of the First Position of Thought towards Objectivity.²⁰ Even in the discussion within the First Position of Thought elements of praise are combined with strong criticism. Metaphysics is first of all presented as a *naïve* conviction in the identity between thought and being.²¹ This belief itself is not negative; to the contrary, it is presented as an essential component of all human relationships to the world.²² All human activities are in fact rooted in the faith that even the most particular, contingent things are essential expressions of some absolute, or universal unity, and that this relation can be unveiled by thought. The more specific task of metaphysics, or of philosophy in general, according to Hegel, would then be to prove this faith. This implies rationally clarifying the relationship between the absolute and the finite, contingent, mundane reality. 'It is true that philosophy initially shares its objects with religion. Both have the truth for their object ... Moreover, both treat the sphere of finite things ... *their relation* to each other and *to God as their truth*' (EL, §1).²³

It is through the clarification of this relationship that metaphysics as First Position of Thought ultimately appears insufficient. This is due to the methodology of metaphysics. The fact that metaphysics accepts the identity of thought and being as a belief, implies that it assumes it without challenging it, or rationally evaluating it. In this way, metaphysics ends up identifying being with the form of thought it is most immediately acquainted with, namely representative thought. In the case of the most naïve form of the metaphysical stance, this implies that metaphysics mistakes the representative content of its thought with the true form of being.²⁴ In the case of modern metaphysics this instead translates in its use of predication as a fundamental form of knowledge.²⁵ 'Metaphysics presupposed in general that knowledge of the absolute could take place by attributing predicates to it' (EL, §28).

Operating within the horizon of representation, modern metaphysics considers both its object, or the absolute,²⁶ and the predicates attributed to it, as single units, separated and opposed to each other.²⁷ Therefore, it finds itself unable to establish an internal and essential connection between its object and its predicates, and ends up being caught into a self-refuting result: its object, which should have been the totality of everything there is (being therefore the highest and richest concept), results as the emptiest and poorest because all of its predicates, which should have been its content and definition, were considered as rigidly separated from it. 'In the end there is nothing left for the concept (as the understanding takes it) but the empty abstraction of the indeterminate *essence* ... The properties that were after all supposed to be determinate and diverse have actually perished in the abstract concept of the pure reality, the indeterminate essence' (EL, §36 R).²⁸

In its reliance on a representative conception of thought, then, metaphysics proves unable to conceive an effective relation between the absolute and finite reality: it either conflates finitude with the absolute – as in ancient or naïve metaphysics – or it separates the absolute from the world by considering it as something entirely devoid of predicates and determination, merely as the subject of a finite judgement – as in modern metaphysics. These aspects are strikingly expressed in the introductory paragraph to the discussion of the Absolute in the Doctrine of Essence:

This positive exposition thus halts the finite just before its disappearing: it considers it an expression and a copy of the absolute. But this transparency of the finite that lets only the absolute transpire through it ends up in complete disappearance, for there is nothing in the finite which would retain for it a difference over against the absolute.

(SL, 468)

The absolute itself appears only as the negation of all predicates, as the void. But since it must equally be spoken of as the position of all predicates, it appears as the most formal of contradictions ... What we have is a formal, unsystematic dialectic that has an easy time picking up a variety of determinations here and there, and is just as at ease demonstrating, on the one hand, their finitude and relativity, as declaring, on the other, that the absolute, which it vaguely envisages as totality, is the dwelling place of all determinations, yet is incapable of raising either the positions or the negations to a true unity.

(SL, 466)

In both cases, one could say that the problem of traditional metaphysics lies according to Hegel in Spinozism: the absolute is understood in such a way that it deprives the finite of its individual, particular value.²⁹ To Hegel, this does not happen only within the conception of the absolute that contemporary interpreters identify with Spinozism, and which Hegel associates with modern Metaphysics, or *alte Metaphysik* (the absolute as the only existing entity, something 'beyond' and 'opposed' to the ultimately non-existent multiplicity of the finite).³⁰ The overlooking of finite's value also ensues when the absolute is understood as something immediately and immanently identified with its determinations, as it occurs in the most naïve version of metaphysics and in pantheistic understandings of the absolute, such as Spinoza's. Whereas in the former case the finite is deprived of its value as a mere appearance or illusion, in the latter it is deprived of its value in the sense that its extremely particular, contingent and specific character is not recognized. More specifically, the understanding of the finite as the immediate manifestation of the absolute does not account for the finite's distinctive opposition to the absolute: as determinate, specific and contingent, the finite should be recognized in its being the negation of the absolute.

The consequences of failure of traditional metaphysics in making sense of the relationship between the absolute and finitude are clear from the passage of the *Logic's* preface previously quoted: finitude is not recognized in its worth, and – in the case of the standpoint of modern metaphysics – mundane life is navigated as a land of darkness, when not relinquished altogether for the 'colorless self-preoccupation of spirit, bent upon itself' (SL, 8).

Yet, the abandonment of the task of metaphysics – taken as the understanding of the connection between one fundamental principle of reality and its finite determinations – also bears heavy consequences. These are the classic themes of Hegel's critique of his time: facts and experiences are invested with indifference and relativism, because there is no principle to sustain their value, and ultimately the opportunity to understand things, to make sense of the world, is lost in a fascination for immediacy, feeling or

intuition that reduces everything to indifference. This is well expressed in Hegel's reflections on empiricism:

Universality and necessity appear to be something *unwarranted*, a subjective coincidence, a mere habit, and its content might just as well be as it is or otherwise. An important consequence of this is that ... the legal and ethical determinations and laws as well as the content of religion appear as something contingent [*Zufälliges*] and their objectivity and inner truth are given up.

(EL, §39)

From these remarks, it does not seem that Hegel's critique of traditional metaphysics aims at abandoning the question concerning the grounding relationship between the finite and the absolute altogether in favour of a restriction of metaphysical inquiry to ontological matters, as 'revised metaphysical' interpreters would suggest. This is confirmed by Hegel's critique of ontology as *metaphysica generalis*, which proposes a variation of the objection to empiricism, claiming that, without a single grounding principle, the many determinations of being would lose their necessity and become arbitrary: 'Due to their multiplicity and finite validity, a principle was lacking for these determinations. For this reason, they had to be enumerated *empirically* and *contingently* ... It can be a matter merely of ... empirical completeness, not the truth and the necessity of such determinations in and for themselves' (EL, §33).

Hegel's solution for overcoming the shortcomings of traditional metaphysics, then, consists not of giving up on its monistic aims altogether but rather reforming its methods and presuppositions, starting from the consideration of thought as mere representation and its reliance on predication. Hegel's goal is to forge the conceptual and methodological tools to think a relationship between the absolute and the finite, which could fully grasp the absolute's grounding of the finite as its moment while, on the other hand, recognizing the finite in its full value. This requires a conception of thought not as representative but as speculative – that is, as something that is able to conceive of essential connections between its determinations and to express a dynamic connection between subject and predicate.

Following such an understanding of thought, its determinations are not rigidly opposed to one another but instead make up an interconnected whole. In contrast to representation, thought determinations do not derive their content and definition from reference to a presupposed 'outside object'. Therefore, thought as a whole is not defined anymore in opposition to objectivity, as a subjective faculty, but seems to be determining and producing its own content by itself: 'The system of concepts ... has to come to completion in an unstoppable and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous ... this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content – for it is the content in itself ... it is the course of the fact itself' (SL, 33).

Considered in this way, thought is not only capable of conceiving an essential connection between absolute and finite, between a unitary and self-identical principle and something that is limited and fractured, but it is itself a unity which is inseparable

from its own determinations as its own essential moments and is therefore identical to being as *Wirklichkeit*, namely as a dynamic unity between the unity of the absolute with itself and finitude or its determination and particularization:

Thinking is the activity of the universal, a relating of itself to itself that is accordingly abstract, a subjectively non-determinate being-with-itself [*Beisichsein*] that at the same time, as far as its *content* is concerned, is only in the basic matter and its determinations ... Thinking is true in terms of content only if it is immersed in the *basic matter* at hand and in terms of form only if it is not a *particular* instance of being or doing of the subject, but instead is consciousness conducting itself precisely as an abstract 'I', *liberated from all the particularity*.

(EL, §23 R)

In this way, thought that removes its opposition to objectivity altogether is not a faculty of a finite subject anymore, which could be held up against reality as a mirror. Instead, it becomes something that is defined not in opposition to its other but as the movement of its production. Thought, then, becomes not the representation but the very structure of reality itself. This is what Hegel means by 'objective thought', the standpoint that is 'the absolute object ... of philosophy' (EL, §25). 'Pure science thus presupposes the liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains thought in so far as this thought is equally the fact as it is in itself; or the fact in itself in so far as this is equally pure thought ... This realm is truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself' (SL, 29).

If thought is defined in this way, the study of its essential structure and of its determinations coincides with the study of the object of metaphysics, namely the relationship between the absolute and the finite. It is in this sense (which does not imply a reduction of traditional metaphysics' aim to a study of the transcendental conditions of intelligibility or to a simple ontology) that Hegel identifies his *Logic* with metaphysics.³¹

In this perspective, Hegel's connection with Kant's critical philosophy appears in a different light than Pippin or the 'revised metaphysical' interpreters would have it. In Hegel's eyes, Kant anticipated the overcoming of traditional metaphysics through speculative logic.³²

This was because Kant insisted against empiricism that the true and objective component of experience was in thought, which he considered as a spontaneous activity, producing its own determinations independent of any reference to external objectivity – as expressed in Kant's notion of the unity of the apperception: 'The *fact is insisted upon* ... that *universality* and *necessity* are to be found in ... experience as ... essential determinations. Now, since this element does not issue from the empirical as such, it belongs to the spontaneity of *thinking* ... The thought-determinations ... constitute the *objectivity* of experiential knowledge' (EL, §40).

Kant, though, did not follow his intuition through: in failing to actually deduce the determinations of thought from the unity of the apperception, he did not consider them as deriving their content from the self-determination of thought and missed their essential connection with the universality of thought as self-reference. For this

reason, he had to preserve the presupposition of some kind of objectivity outside thought, providing content to its determinations. From this perspective, thought is still conceived as a subjective faculty in opposition to the world. Therefore, Kant lacked the tools to recognize that thought itself, as a universal unity which grounds and produces its own determinations, is an expression of the unconditioned – that is, is of the structure of reality itself, and not its mere representation, or the ‘conceptual scheme’ of objectivity, determined by human subjects.³³

Hegel's metaphysics, then, seems to exceed all the three options provided by the contemporary debate: it is not a revival of pre-critical Spinozism, neither does it suggest a conflation of ontological structures with transcendental conditions of intelligibility nor is it limited to an ontology.

But what exactly does it entail – that is, what kind of relationship between the absolute and the finite does it propose?

Hegel's ‘metaphysics of subjectivity’

The absolute-finite relationship that constitutes the heart of Hegel's metaphysics is the object of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Its complete expression can be found in the final part of the *Logic*, that is, Subjective Logic, and more specifically, in the Idea: ‘The idea is ... the objectively true, or the true as such ... *Something has truth only in so far as it is idea*’ (SL, 670).

Yet this relationship is present throughout the whole *Logic*, only less and less visible as one goes up to the beginning of the *Logic*. As already discussed, the object of the *Logic* is objective thought, as a movement of immanent, self-determined articulation in which thought is both the universal, absolute unity that grounds its determinations, and the variety of its particular concepts. Even the first and poorest determination in the *Logic* presents this coimplication of universality and particularity, of absolute and finitude. The development of the *Logic* consists in expanding and explicating the terms of this co-implication. The crucial step in this explication is making a distinction between the moments of universality, or selfreference, and those of particularity, or determination. Their distinctness and co-implication are not immediately visible: considering the immanent movement of thought requires that we do not interfere in its development with external beliefs and determinations³⁴. This includes the presupposition of a distinction between a self-referential moment, in which thought is identical with itself and therefore undetermined, and a determined moment within thought.³⁵ On its first appearance, then, thought cannot be separate from its determinations; only once its determinations are revealed to refer to some underlying unity, in which they negate their immediacy and independence, can such a unity be conceptualized. First, then, it should be asked whether being entails determinations, and, if so, whether the determinations of being could be considered as independent; only later, once they have been laid out, defined and revealed in their relative dependency, an underlying unity of thought throughout its determinations can be recognized (Giuspoli 2019: 88). This sums up the development of the Doctrine of Being, in which being appears first as the most indeterminate, then it reverses in being inescapably determined. Throughout the

whole Doctrine, then, the individuation of the determinations of being is made sense of – at least tentatively – without abandoning the plane of immediacy. The discussion of Measure, though, reveals the impossibility of understanding individuation through reference to relationships between determinations and particulars: their reciprocal interconnectedness constitutes an underlying substrate which cannot be conceptualized as an immediate determination in its turn (Schick 2019). This is essence. ‘The truth of being is essence. Being is the immediate ... Knowledge ... penetrates beyond it on the presupposition that ... this background constitutes the truth of being’ (SL, 337).

The theme of the whole Doctrine of Essence, then, lies in understanding the relationship between the many determinations of being and that underlying substrate to which they seem to refer. More specifically, the problem is to make sense of the independence and persistency of the determinations of being – what Hegel calls ‘immediacy’ – within their grounding relationship to essence. Considering them as a mere instantiation of essence would mean considering their being negated or absorbed in the former as their true and realized status, relapsing in the paradoxical understanding of traditional metaphysics of the absolute as an empty, abstract notion that has the whole world outside of itself. Yet, the Doctrine of Being has shown that without a grounding mediation within essence the determinations of being end up in the same kind of indifference for which Hegel reproached the *metaphysica generalis*. The full understanding of this relationship is achieved only in the transition from the Doctrine of Essence to the Doctrine of the Concept.³⁶ Its fundamental and minimal structure, though, is already present in subsection ‘C. Reflection’ of the first chapter of the Doctrine of Essence.³⁷ The relationship between essence and being, or between universal and particular, or absolute and finitude, is here shown to consist of a movement of ‘absolute counter-repelling’ (SL, 348).

Through this movement, essence produces its determinations as immediate – and therefore as apparently independent, groundless or, as Hegel defines them, ‘presupposed’. This is made possible because, first of all, essence is not a substantial substrate but pure negativity, that is to say, the movement which negates the independence of the determinations of being and thus constitutes their unity: ‘Essence is what it is, not through a negativity foreign to it but through one which is its own – the infinite movement of being ... it is itself this negativity, the self-sublation of otherness and of determinateness’ (SL, 338).

The mediation through which essence should then posit the determinations of being as its own, then, is not a simple negation by which the particular determination is isolated from essence’s substantial unity as a part or an emanation. Rather, it is a double negation: in producing its determination, essence negates the very negation that allowed it to refer the determinations to its unity, and therefore it posits them as immediate particulars, which carry no trace of their grounding relation to essence. Vice versa, any attempt at self-reference and identification with itself is a double negation for essence because this would require negating its determinations. Since these are not mere negatives of essence but are themselves double negations, this would imply a reference of negation to itself. For this reason, Hegel also later describes the relationship between essence and being as a movement of ‘self-rejoining’ (SL, 484): the absolute reunites with itself through its very own fragmentation in finite, contingent

particulars because in those determinations the movement of double negation, which constitutes the absolute's unity and self-reference, is realized. Essence is therefore no static, substantial or positive substrate, but is precisely 'absolute self-repelling': its coincidence with itself is its division, or the production of its other:

Reflection ... *finds* an immediate *before it* ... from which it is the turning back ... This antecedent *comes to be* only by being *left behind*; its immediacy is sublated immediacy. – The sublated immediacy is ... essence that *arrives* at itself, simple being equal to itself. This arriving at itself is thus the sublating of itself and self-repelling, presupposing reflection, and its repelling of itself from itself is the arriving at itself ... The movement of reflection is ... an *absolute* internal *counter-repelling*.

(SL, 348)

In this perspective, then, both notions of the absolute that characterize the Spinozism of traditional metaphysics are refuted: essence is not a positive, substantial substrate laying 'beyond' determinations, or a unity persisting through its determinations and degrading their value through the mere instrumental function of manifesting it. The absolute is full and complete in its particular, contingent, finite and many determinations. Yet, this does not mean a mere identification of absolute and immediacy or particularity: even though it cannot be isolated from particularity and determination, the absolute does provide a form of grounding. The underlying movement of essence as 'absolute counter-repelling' does provide a unity, although 'negative'. By this formulation, Hegel means a unity consisting of a movement rather of a substantive entity 'beyond' being. Formulated more precisely, then, such a unity lies in the reciprocal, dynamic relations through which particulars are produced and relate to each other.

In Hegel's perspective, then, what was the traditional object of metaphysics should be the main focus of philosophy – that is, the one principle of determination, or of finitude, is not a 'substrate' or a 'positive unity' emanated through the particulars. Rather, it is a movement, and more precisely a process, of 'self-repelling' and 'self-rejoining', which propels the whole reality. As processual, the one principle of determination, or – more precisely – being as *Wirklichkeit*, produces its own determinations without any outside mediator and realizes itself through them. In this process, it both 'self-repels' itself and 'self-rejoins' itself in its determination, or finitude. In this way, the principle of determination is shown to have finitude as its moment without misconstruing its properly finite character: it is only insofar as determination is conceived as the negation of all essential ties to its principle – being a 'double negation' – that the principle of determination can 'rejoin itself' in its own 'self-repelling'. On the other hand, the principle of determination also preserves a 'grounding' role towards determination and finitude: even though it is not a traditional metaphysical 'substrate', because it is not a positive substance separated from its determinations, the principle of determination is still a unity with itself, which encompasses all determination as an essential moment of its own self-reference.³⁸ This is fully demonstrated in the third and last section of the Doctrine of Essence: 'III. Actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*).

In this sense, the principle of determination, or the unitary principle of reality, which was the object of traditional metaphysics, is conceived in Hegel's metaphysics as a subject, or as subjectivity.

In traditional metaphysics the absolute was either conceived as something entirely separate and devoid of determinations, or as something that is manifested in the finite but is indifferent to its specific contingent and determinate character as finite. The Doctrine of Essence shows that it is for this very reason – something which is connected to the assumption of the standpoint of representation instead of that of objective or speculative thought – that traditional metaphysics could not conceive of an essential relationship between the absolute and its determinations.

Hegel notes that it is due to this insufficient understanding of the absolute-finite relationship that metaphysics traced the production of determinations and their connection to the absolute back to the limitations of thought as subjectivity:

Cognition ... behaves like an external understanding ... It is this external reflection that both generates the distinction of representation and being and reduces it to absolute identity, dissolving it there. But this whole movement goes on outside the absolute.

(SL, 472–473)

[Metaphysics', E.T.] way of proceeding consisted in attributing predicates to the object to be known ... This, however, represents an external reflection ... since the determinations (the predicates) are ready-made [*fertig*] in my representation and attributed to the object in an external manner only. By contrast, true knowledge of an object must be of the sort that the object determines itself out of itself and does not receive its predicates from outside.

(EL, §28 R)

In this sense, if in traditional metaphysics the production and tracing back of determinations to the absolute was subjective, in the sense that it was seen as dependent on the activity of the (finite) subject formulating judgements, one could say that Hegel's metaphysics is a 'metaphysics of subjectivity', in the sense that it presents an understanding of the absolute-finite determination in which subjectivity, that is the activity of production and recollection of determinations, is proper to the absolute. Furthermore, such activity is all there is to the 'absolute', or to the unitary principle of determination, which was the object of traditional metaphysics, and should, according to Hegel, be the focus of philosophy more generally. In other words, in Hegelian metaphysics the principle of determination is nothing but subjectivity – not in the sense that a (human) transcendental subject informs and shapes our experience of objectivity, but in the sense that reality itself, in its totality, is subjective, or produces its determinations and is realized in its self-identity through them.³⁹

Hegel's 'metaphysics of modernity'

How, then, should one make sense of the fact that Hegel compares his time to 'a temple without a holy of holies'?

This appears to be both a positive and negative statement.

Hegel's time did indeed need a 'holy of holies', a metaphysics, which could oppose the relativist tendency of considering the world as something merely arbitrary, that just 'is what it is', or in which truth lays beyond the insurmountable limits of subjectivity. Metaphysics allows instead to make sense of the world, to truly understand it and therefore to be 'present' to it. Yet, the 'holy of holies' of metaphysics, the absolute which grounds all things, should not be conceived as something indifferent to the colourful world of finitude, or held in a *sancta sanctorum* far away from the 'ornaments' of the temple. Contrary to what the 'revised metaphysical' interpretation implies, though, this does not require an elimination of the unity accounting for finitude and determination from the concerns of philosophy and a consequent collapse of the monistic, proper metaphysical plane, into the ontological one. Through the overcoming of traditional metaphysics, the unity that makes sense of finitude is not denied but only conceived in a new light: it is now regarded as something that incessantly 'makes itself' through it. The true, then, is dynamic; not a substrate indifferent to determination, or a merely finite given.

Thus conceived, Hegelian metaphysics exceeds both traditional metaphysics, which was limited to a Spinozist understanding of the absolute as a 'beyond' or as a unity indifferent to determination,⁴⁰ and mainstream contemporary analytic metaphysics, which is the reference to revised metaphysical interpretations of Hegel, and that is for the most part limited to ontological classification (Schaffer 2009). For this reason, I believe, it can be an interesting interlocutor in contemporary debates in metaphysics and meta-metaphysics.

The main reason why I think Hegel's metaphysics is relevant today, though, is the same reason why Hegel himself thought it was relevant for his own time. Hegel's metaphysics provide us with the tools to make sense of – and not to overlook or to just accept – those aspects of the world that traditional metaphysics overlooked and that were instead stressed as vital by modernity: finitude, but also complexity and processuality. The understanding of these aspects is still a central challenge for our time – and it is in this field that I think Hegel could be found to be more alive than ever.

Notes

- 1 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
- 2 The claim, here referred to empiricism, can be extended to Kantian philosophy as well, as noted by Hegel himself in §40: 'Critical philosophy shares with empiricism the supposition that experience is the *sole* basis of knowledge.'
- 3 This is true both for American classic pragmatism and for analytic philosophy, which has Russell as its 'founding father'. In both cases, the hostility to Hegel was rooted

- in the opposition to British Idealism. See Rockmore (2001: 343–346) and Redding (2020b: 355–364).
- 4 This position is now identified as ‘traditional metaphysical view’. See Redding (2020a: 2.2).
 - 5 The main proponents of this reading are Charles Taylor (1975) and Michael Rosen (1984). A version of this interpretation, stripped down of its theological undertones, has been proposed by Rolf-Peter Horstmann (1991) and Frederik Beiser (2005).
 - 6 Before Pippin’s there was a first, and less fortunate, reading connecting Hegel’s philosophy to a Kantian and transcendental descent and claiming its contemporary relevance. In a renowned article, Klaus Hartmann (1972) suggested that Hegel’s *Science of Logic* was a ‘category theory’.
 - 7 See Horstmann (1999). Pippin aimed at solving the interpretive dilemma discussed by Horstmann, which posed the alternative between preserving the systematic nature or Hegel’s philosophy, remaining true to it and finding some contemporary interest in it by isolating some parts from their original outdated and metaphysical root: ‘Such an interpretive dilemma could be solved if it could be showed that Hegel’s speculative position, basically his theory of the Absolute Idea ... could be interpreted ... in a way that is not committed to a philosophically problematic theological metaphysics’ (Pippin 1989: 5).
 - 8 Nineteen years after the publication of *Hegel’s Idealism*, Pippin published his second book entirely devoted to Hegel’s theoretical philosophy, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the ‘Science of Logic’* (2018). The book explicitly called Pippin’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy as a ‘conceptual scheme idealism’ a form of metaphysics – a term which he did not use to describe Hegel’s account in *Hegel’s Idealism*. This gave the impression that Pippin had radically changed his reading of Hegel’s philosophy, and of the *Logic* in particular. As has been noted by several interpreters after the book was published, as is already evident in Pippin (2015, 2017) and as stated by Pippin himself (2018: 255, n. 4), *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows* is not meant as a radical revision of the interpretation given in *Hegel’s Idealism*, but rather as a specification and a clarification. Pippin did not change his main interpretative claims, he only defined his reading of Hegel as a specific kind of metaphysics – what he calls in the book ‘the metaphysics of the ordinary’, relating it to the ‘metaphysics of experience’ often attributed to Kant. See Pippin (2018: 39–100).
 - 9 On this, see Rorty (1982) and Bernstein (1977: 41). Pippin’s main reference, though, was Wilfrid Sellars’s reading of Kant’s deduction and of his notion of intuition. For a reconstruction of the Sellars–Pippin connection, see Corti (2014: 18–29, 29–57, 183–188).
 - 10 See Pippin (1989: 7–8): ‘I have a much more specific sense of idealism in mind ... Simply put, I propose to take Hegel at his word when he tells us ... that ... the basic position of his entire philosophy should be understood as a direct variation on a crucial Kantian theme, the “transcendental unity of apperception” ... Their [Kant’s and Hegel’s] common theme involves the argument that any subject must be able to make certain basic discriminations in any experience in order for there to be experience at all. Accordingly, such basic conceptual discriminations cannot be derived from experience and, if it can be shown that such distinctions are constitutive of the possibility of experience, cannot be refuted by experience.’ Pippin’s reading has, amongst other things, been strongly criticized for its ‘excessively conceptualist’ reading of Kant. See Sedgwick (1993), McDowell (2009: 83) and Corti (2014: 184).

- 11 With this second claim, Hegel set to resolve the tension between the conceptualist implications of the Kantian deduction and Kant's residual reference to pure intuitions, which Kant couldn't overcome in his work and which became – according to Pippin – the central question for all post-Kantian philosophy. See Pippin (1989: 16–60, 79–109).
- 12 According to Pippin, this is done in the first four chapters of the *Phenomenology* and in the objective logic: 'The confrontation with a "realist skepticism" about our conceptual scheme is the self-appointed task of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*' (1989: 93–94). With reference to the *Logic*, he writes: 'For there to be empirical differentiation ... there must be ... criteria in place to determine what can count as a determinate object or explanation and these criteria can be understood and legitimated only ... by reference to other possible attempts at such "criteria setting", and their internal incompleteness' (Pippin 1989: 170, 232). Pippin's reading of the objective logic revolves around the claim that both realism and the kind of mind-world dualism equally underlying rationalist dogmatism and Kant's understanding of knowledge as mere subjective appearance (which are the targets of the Doctrine of Being and of the Doctrine of Essence respectively) are unable to produce an effective, non-contradictory understanding of what it is a determinate object.
- 13 The interpretation of the identification of *Logic* and metaphysics in §24 of EL has become the core of Pippin's more recent works. Pippin suggests reading the passage as an indication that logic can coincide with metaphysics thanks to Kant's transcendental turn, which imposes considering thought's transcendental structures as ontological structures. See Pippin (2017: 199): 'Hegel does not say that metaphysics has a subject matter that requires a speculative logic in the Hegelian sense, but that this new metaphysics is logic ... Logic can only now coincide with metaphysics, after we have somehow passed beyond the traditional metaphysical view.' As already noted by Stern (2009: 6) with reference to *Hegel's Idealism*, Pippin's notion of metaphysics is very close to the metaphysics envisaged by Michael Dummett or Peter F. Strawson.
- 14 My emphasis.
- 15 See Redding (2020a: 2.2). According to Redding, the main proponents of this view are James Kreines and Robert Stern. It should be noted that Redding and other critics of the debate apply this label, while none of the interpreters put under it have explicitly identified with it. The interpretations of Kreines and Stern are very different one from the other – and sometimes even openly opposed. Nevertheless, Redding's classification, grasps an aspect that the 'revised metaphysical' interpreters themselves have not explicitly acknowledged, and which is yet crucial to the argument of this chapter. All the 'revised metaphysical' interpreters claim in fact the metaphysical character of Hegel's philosophy with – explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious – reference to the same notion of 'metaphysics.' This notion coincides with the widespread use of the term within recent Anglo-American philosophy, sees metaphysics as ontology, and is in my opinion influenced by Quine's definition of naturalized metaphysics as an inquiry into 'what there is'.
- 16 See Kreines (2008: 49): 'By metaphysical rationalism I mean any view combining these two features: a commitment to a principle of sufficient reason, requiring that everything real must depend on some complete underlying ground or reason ... and also an inference to the conclusion that there must ultimately be some one fundamental being that grounds or provides the ultimate or complete reason for absolutely everything.' This perspective is usually associated with Spinozism, that

- is, to the conviction that the 'ultimate or complete reason for absolutely everything' would be the only one really existing entity, therefore depriving all contingency and finitude of its value. For a presentation and a critique of the association between monism and Spinozism in contemporary analytic metaphysics, see Schaffer (2009, 2010).
- 17 An analogous, although less explicit, refutation of monism is also found in Robert Stern, where he claims that the categories studied in the *Logic* should not be applied to being as a whole, and that therefore for Hegel there would be no 'Absolute' in the traditional, *metaphysica specialis* kind of way. See Stern (2009: 33–34).
 - 18 The claim is here referred to the lower levels of reality (i.e. those described by Mechanism and Chemism), but to Kreines this goes – with a different degree of inherent contradictions – for all levels of reality other than *Geist*. In his view, monism would suppress this fundamental pluralist and inherently contradictory, insufficient aspect of reality.
 - 19 My translation. In the Jena systems the first part of the system was composed of logic, a critique of intellectual and finite understanding aimed at overcoming its rigid separations and uncovering an underlying unity through all determinations, and of metaphysics, namely 'proper philosophy' or rational knowledge.
 - 20 A critique of metaphysics was part of the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* even in the 1817 version of the *Encyclopaedia*. See E17, §§19–25.
 - 21 'The first position is the naïve manner of proceeding ... which contains the *belief* that through *thinking things over the truth comes to be known*' (EL, §26). The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
 - 22 EL, §26: 'The first position is the *naïve* manner of proceeding which contains ... the *belief* that ... what the objects [*Objekte*] truly are is brought before consciousness ... All philosophy in its beginnings, all the sciences, even the daily doings and dealings of consciousness, live in this belief.'
 - 23 My emphasis.
 - 24 EL, §26: 'In this belief, thought engages the objects directly, reproduces out of itself the content of sensations and intuitions as a content of thought, and finds satisfaction in the like as the truth.'
 - 25 It is important to specify that, alongside the ambiguity of Hegel's attitude towards metaphysics in general, which runs throughout his whole production, there is another element that accompanies Hegel's consideration of metaphysics from the early works to the mature system – that is, the distinction between 'ancient metaphysics' (usually identified as *Metaphysik* and seldom as *älteste Metaphysik*), that is Greek metaphysics and 'old metaphysics' (*alte Metaphysik*), that is scholastic and modern metaphysics, whose most representative example is usually taken to be Christian Wolff (Bourgeois 2012). In the First Position of Thought, this distinction is found in §27: 'Because it has no consciousness of its opposition, it is possible for this kind of thinking to be both genuine *speculative* philosophizing in terms of its content as well as to dwell in *finite* thought-determinations, i.e. the *as yet unresolved* opposition.' Greek metaphysics has a much higher speculative potential: its content is speculative, that is, it exposes the unity of thought and being, which is the object of speculative thought as well. Yet, it lacks the correct *form* to expound its content because it does not thematize the opposition of thought to being and, with it, the moment of 'extreme particularity', which is yet a crucial moment in the understanding of the identity of thought and being. In this way, Greek metaphysics remains 'trapped' within an opposition that does not recognize,

and merely collapses the dimension of thought, of determination, of particularity, of contingency and movement onto the dimension of being, understood as some sort of static universality. Hegel makes similar remarks with reference to Greek art in LA, 299–302, 427–440.

- 26 As already recalled, the objects of traditional metaphysics were considered as distinct (being, soul, world, God). Hegel clarifies that this distinction is due to the representative standpoint of traditional metaphysics, and suggests that these are all different representative approximations of the concept of the Absolute, as the self-grounding entity which is the true, original object of metaphysics. See EL, §30: 'Its objects were totalities, to be sure, which in and of themselves belong to ... the thinking of the in-itself *concrete* universal – *soul, world, God*. Metaphysics, however, took them up from [the sphere of] *representation*, laid them down as *ready-made, given* subjects for the application of the determinations of the understanding to them.'
- 27 'The thinking of old metaphysics was a *finite* thinking, for it moved among thought-determinations whose boundaries counted for it as something fixed ... If we look ... at that old metaphysics as far as its way of proceeding is concerned ... it did not go beyond thinking in terms of merely *understanding*. It took up the abstract thought-determinations in their immediacy and allowed them to count as predicates of the true ... When talking about thinking, one must distinguish *finite* thinking, thinking in terms of merely *understanding*, from thinking that is *infinite* and *rational*. The thought-determinations as they present themselves in an immediate and isolated way are *finite* determinations' (EL, §28 A).
- 28 This self-refuting result reveals the insufficiency of predication for the understanding of the objects of metaphysics: 'Objects of reason ... cannot be determined by means of ... finite predicates, and the aspiration to do so was the defect of old metaphysics' (EL, §28 R). With the use of additions goes the due warning that they are lecture notes and they should not, as a matter of fact, be quoted as a primary source. I am here recurring to additions mainly for matters of space: they express more concisely concepts that could still clearly be found in §§26–36 but in a longer detour than I cannot reconstruct here.
- 29 This latter aspect is made clearer in the *Science of logic*: 'This transparency of the finite that lets only the absolute transpire through it ends up in complete disappearance, for there is nothing in the finite which would retain for it a difference over against the absolute; as a medium, it is absorbed by that through which it shines' (SL, 468). This understanding of the absolute is the referent of Absolute indifference in the discussion of measure, of the 'positive exposition' of the Absolute, and of the Relation of substantiality. See SL, 330–333, 468–469, 490–492. It is also, notoriously, the referent for the refutation of Spinozism in the 'On the concept in general' section (SL, 472–476, 511–512).
- 30 The notion of Spinozism presented by contemporary metaphysics and contemporary interpreters is in this sense closer to Jacobi's.
- 31 The notorious §24, where Hegel says '*Logic* thus coincides with *metaphysics*, i.e. the science of *things* captured in *thoughts* that have counted as expressing *the essentialities of things*' comes by no coincidence right after the definition of thought as both universal and particular presented through §§20–23.
- 32 'Critical philosophy did indeed already turn metaphysics into logic' (SL, 30).
- 33 'The Critical philosophy ... does not address the content and the specific relationship that ... thought-determinations have vis-à-vis each other. Instead, it examines

them with a view to the opposition of *subjectivity* and *objectivity* in general' (EL, §41). Addition 2 to this paragraph is especially enlightening. There Hegel distinguishes three notions of objectivity that are equally active in Kant: the first is commonsensical objectivity, as something external to thought and revealed in perception; the second is the more properly Kantian understanding of objectivity as the form given by thought to the manifold of intuition; the third is the notion of 'absolute' objectivity attributed to the thing-in-itself. Hegel notes how Kant fails to see that the second notion of objectivity could actually entail and ground the other two. For this reason, he thinks of the objectivity of thought as something merely 'subjective'.

- 34 See Houlgate (2006: 29–53, 117–122).
- 35 I am recurring to this 'external' argument for the sake of brevity. Hegel actually demonstrates the impossibility to thematize the universal moment first immanently in the discussion of Being-Nothing-Becoming and in the consequent transition to Determinate being. There it is shown that thought itself, considered without any presuppositions whatsoever, cannot keep its absolutely undetermined state and reveals itself therefore as immediately determined. See Lugarini (1998: 239–276).
- 36 On this, see Bowman's compelling consideration of absolute negativity as the essence of the Hegelian Concept (Bowman 2013: esp. 26–61 and 201–238).
- 37 I share Henrich's consideration of the section as the essential core not only of the Logic but also of Hegel's philosophy in general, as the minimal expression of the understanding of substance as subject. See Henrich (1971). For a discussion of the section C. Reflection, see also Houlgate (2011).
- 38 The point of the whole Doctrine of Essence, how I take it, could also be put this way: to properly account for finitude, or determination, the absolute, or unitary principle of reality, which was the object of traditional metaphysics, cannot be conceived as a positive substrate, or as a positive unity with itself.
- 39 This notion of 'subjectivity', then, does not have any personalistic or panlogistic implications.
- 40 As held throughout the chapter, the term 'Spinozism' is here used to refer to a standpoint that broadly characterizes traditional metaphysics and which presents an understanding of the absolute as a positive unity transcending and/or negating the finite's specificity. It is then not to be understood as indicating Spinoza's standpoint specifically.

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Post-Analytic Philosophy and Hegelian Amphibians

Paul Giladi

For Hegel, what makes philosophy *sui generis* and axiologically significant is how such inquiry enables *Geist* (spirit) to understand itself. The process of *Geist* understanding itself involves doing justice to our *geistige Einstellung* (spiritual attitude), namely our status as discursive amphibians engaging in multifaceted modes of sense-making. In this way, philosophical reflection on *Geistigkeit* (mindedness) illuminates the particular kind of epistemic architecture we have for experiencing the world from our human perspective. In this chapter, I argue that a particularly rich and helpful way of making sense of Hegel's metaphilosophy is provided by reflecting on Hegel in relation to the development of '*post-analytic philosophy*'. I take the expression 'post-analytic philosophy' to have a narrow extension in one sense of the term and a broad extension in another sense of the term. By the *narrow* extension, I mean the respective specific criticisms levelled against analytic philosophy by W.V. Quine in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (1951), by Wilfrid Sellars in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (1956), by Donald Davidson in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' (1974) and by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). By the *broad* extension, 'post-analytic philosophy' refers to the Anglo-American analytic tradition's internal critique through (a) its gradual rapprochement with its continental European cousin's traditions as well as through (b) the revival of pragmatism. Post-analytic philosophy's self-image is no longer a conception of philosophy as monogamous with the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences), but a Hegelian conception of philosophy as a *humanistic discipline*, discursively polyamorous with both the natural sciences and cultural theory.

Moving beyond contemporary mainstream Anglo-American metaphilosophy

Contemporary metaphilosophical discourse, at least in the Anglo-American analytic tradition,¹ principally focuses on two debates. The first dispute centres on questions concerning the viability of conceiving philosophical inquiry either as conceptual

analysis or as experimentally oriented science.² Is philosophical methodology typified and distinguished by engaging in *a priori* investigations and using intuitions as the starting-off point of departure into metaphysics amongst others? Or is philosophical methodology now best explicated in terms of how well it supports our best current natural and empirical scientific theories and practices? The second debate focuses on whether philosophy ought to be constructive – and *solve* problems – or whether philosophy ought to be therapeutic – and *dissolve* problems.³

Focusing on the first debate in particular, for the purpose of this chapter, I would contend that an arguably more significant dialectic is occluded in contemporary Anglophone metaphilosophical discourse: *why should analytic metaphilosophy be conceived as a first-order debate between armchair apriorism and experimentalism?* In this respect, I take the more substantive metaphilosophical dispute to concern *second-order* discourse about the role philosophy plays in relation to *both* the natural sciences as well as the human sciences. To use Bernard Williams's expression, what is the professional *self-image* of philosophy in the Anglo-American analytic tradition?

I think it is reasonable to claim that the professional self-image of philosophy in the Anglo-American analytic tradition is naturalism, the view that *the image of the world provided by the natural sciences is all there is to the world*.⁴ Naturalism, therefore, has metaphysical *and* methodological dimensions: (1) at the most fundamental ontological level, reality is just what the natural sciences deem it to be; and (2) our ways of intelligibly articulating reality, the ways in which we make sense of things, are ultimately justifiable only by the methods and practices of the *Naturwissenschaften*. The conjunction of (1) and (2) is often referred to as 'scientific naturalism'.

A significant consequence of the naturalization of philosophic inquiry and the ascendancy of scientific naturalism is that the defence of the autonomy of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) has also changed, to the extent that in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, defending the autonomy of philosophy is *almost* exclusively articulated from some kind of naturalistic standpoint. For, even though one might deem philosophy as irreducible to natural science, one often still maintains a naturalistic bent that philosophy must be practised in such a way that is supportive of or continuous with physics, chemistry and biology. To put this another way, given how rapid and entrenched naturalization has been, it is reasonable to claim that the *default* position for mainstream analytic philosophers is naturalism *tout court*, insofar as the burden of proof is automatically on those who are critical of or resistant to naturalism *tout court*. As Williams, Jaegwon Kim, and Mario De Caro and David Macarthur respectively write:

It is hard to deny that over too much of the subject, the idea of getting it right which has gone into the self-image of analytic philosophy, and which has supported some of its exclusions, is one drawn from the natural sciences; and that the effects of this can be unhappy.

(Williams 2006: 203)

If current analytic philosophy can be said to have a philosophical ideology, it is unquestionably, naturalism.

(Kim 2003: 84)

Naturalism is the current orthodoxy, at least within Anglo-American philosophy.
(De Caro and Macarthur 2004: 1)

In terms of one's philosophical coming of age in many analytic departments, one is baptized a naturalist, to remove the original sin of supernaturalism. In terms of one's aspirations to be taken seriously in the Anglophone philosophical world and maintain good working relationships with the relevant powers-that-be, naturalism must be a doctrine which demands absolute loyalty on pain of some intellectual *auto da fé*. To quote Hilary Putnam:

Today the most common use of the term 'naturalism' might be described as follows: philosophers – perhaps even a majority of all the philosophers writing about issues in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind and philosophy of language – announce in one or another conspicuous place in their essays and books that they are 'naturalists' or that the view or account being defended is a 'naturalist' one; this announcement, in its placing and emphasis, resembles the placing of the announcement in articles written in Stalin's Soviet Union that a view was in agreement with Comrade Stalin's; as in the case of the latter announcement, it is supposed to be clear that any view which is not 'naturalist' (not in agreement with Comrade Stalin's) is anathema, and could not possibly be correct.

(Putnam 2004: 59)

Over many years, however, the naturalistic self-image of Anglo-American analytic philosophy has come under scrutiny by analytically trained thinkers, such as Richard Bernstein, Robert Brandom, Stanley Cavell, Donald Davidson, Susan Haack, John Haugeland, Alasdair MacIntyre, Joseph Margolis, John McDowell, Adrian Moore, Stephen Mulhall, Thomas Nagel, Hilary Putnam, Nicholas Rescher, Richard Rorty, Wilfrid Sellars, Charles Taylor and Bernard Williams,⁵ who are – in varying respects and with varying levels of intensity – *internal critics* of the Anglo-American analytic tradition.⁶ Crucially, though, these 'post-analytic'⁷ thinkers are *not* clustered together because each of them contributes to a fully defined and articulated philosophical tradition. As George Duke and colleagues correctly write, 'it would be an exaggeration to speak of a unified philosophical movement embodying a rapprochement' (Duke et al. 2010: 7). Rather, Bernstein and others are clustered in terms of how they all *broadly* share a critical stance towards the naturalistic self-image, where the more critical a thinker is of the naturalist orthodoxy, the closer such a thinker is to being branded 'apostate'.⁸ To understand this in more detail, I think it would be helpful to illustrate the way in which Russell's conception of the analytic method *grounds* the orthodoxy of naturalism:

Modern analytical empiricism ... differs from that of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume by its incorporation of mathematics and its development of a powerful logical technique. It is thus able, in regard to certain problems, to achieve definite answers, *which have the quality of science rather than of philosophy*. It has the advantage, in comparison with the philosophies of the system-builders, of being able to tackle its problems one at a time, instead of having to invent at one stroke a block theory of

the whole universe. *Its methods, in this respect, resemble those of science.* I have no doubt that, in so far as philosophical knowledge is possible, it is by such methods that it must be sought; I have also no doubt that, by these methods, many ancient problems are completely soluble.

(Russell 1945: 834, my emphases)

There is something almost *irresistible* to the analytic method. Crucially, what makes the analytic method so appealing and enduring is that its charming qualities are deep-rooted in our psychological architecture and cognitive make-up: as human beings, to use Adrian Moore's expression, we are sense-making creatures. We inquire into things, to render the world around us rationally intelligible and meaningful. From an anthropological perspective, then, the analytic method's charm consists in appealing to our basic cognitive drive to render reality discursively accessible.

However, construing the analytic method as the exclusive ally of our anthropological disposition for sense-making is rather problematic. For, in many respects, the most sensitive, reflective, and nuanced inquiries are motivated precisely by (a) wanting to render reality intelligible and meaningful; and on (b) wanting to help us feel at home with our sense-making nature. Such philosophical problematization can be most clearly evidenced (at a general level) in our struggles to balance the analytical drive with our default commitment to phenomena, which *eo ipso* seem to radically differ from leptons, quarks and quantum fields. The phenomena in question range from first-person intentional states, reasons and meaning to numbers and moods. In many respects, these phenomena are integral parts of the manifest image of the world, a humanistic perspective that is indispensable for human beings *qua* inquirers. The subsequent situation, then, is one in which the conflict between the analytical drive and the humanistic drive illustrates that 'there can be no presumption that procedures suited to the natural sciences will in general serve philosophy well' (Moore 2012: 45). To quote Williams and McDowell, respectively, here:

When we reflect on our conceptualization of the world, we might be able to recognize from inside it that some of our concepts and ways of representing the world are more dependent than others on our own perspective, our peculiar and local ways of apprehending things.

(Williams 2006: 185)

Modern science understands its subject matter in a way that threatens, at least, to leave it disenchanted, as Weber put the point in an image that has become a commonplace. The image marks a contrast between two kinds of intelligibility: the kind that is sought by (as we call it) natural science ['the kind we find in a phenomenon when we see it as governed by natural law'] and the kind we find in something when we place it in relation to other occupants of 'the logical space of reasons' ['the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning'].

(McDowell 1994: 70)

Arguably, the most significant anti-Russellian turn in Anglo-American philosophy comes from Sellars.

Sellars and the post-analytic turn

In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars aimed to radically revise the project of epistemology. Central to his Kantian commitment to the *conceptual* irreducibility of normativity and intentionality is Sellars's rejection of an *analysis/definition* of knowledge: 'In characterising an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says' (Sellars 1997: §36). Rather than conceiving of knowledge in terms of justified true belief,⁹ or even in terms of that model's Nozickean modifications,¹⁰ Sellars abandons any *talk about knowledge* that frames it as something to be analysed. The concern about analysis from the Sellarsian perspective, which importantly differs from Timothy Williamson's arguments for the category of knowledge as fundamental and therefore unanalyzable,¹¹ is that analysis fails to do justice to the *intersubjective dimensions* of epistemic practice. As Sellars writes:

One couldn't have observational knowledge of *any* fact unless one knew many *other* things as well. And let me emphasize that the point is not taken care of by distinguishing between *knowing how* and *knowing that*, and admitting that observational knowledge requires a lot of 'know how.' For the point is specifically that observational knowledge of any particular fact, e.g. that this is green, presupposes that one knows general facts of the form '*X is a reliable symptom of Y*.' And to admit this requires an abandonment of the traditional empiricist idea that observational knowledge 'stands on its own feet.'

(Sellars 1997: §36)

Focusing on the production and reproduction of epistemic norms and knowledge-attributions that undercuts the Myth of the Given necessarily involves articulating knowledge as a particular kind of language game – where this epistemic practice is inherently normative, insofar as one is, to use Robert Brandom's well-known left-wing Sellarsian expression, playing the game of giving and asking for reasons. In other words, the idea of framing questions about knowledge in this manner involves viewing such an epistemic kind as something one cannot intelligibly grasp independently of a deliberative public sphere. Since Sellars construes human beings as *persons* – namely *intentional, linguistic, discursive, agentive beings* – the normative *space of reasons* clearly contrasts with the descriptive *space of nature*. As Sellars puts it:

To say that a certain person desired to do A, thought it his duty to do B but was forced to do C, is not to describe him as one might *describe* a scientific specimen. One does, indeed, describe him, but one does something more. And it is this

something more which is the irreducible core framework of persons ... Now, the fundamental principles of a community, which define what is 'correct' or 'incorrect', 'right' or 'wrong', 'done' or 'not done', are the most general common *intentions* of that community with respect to the behavior of the members of the group. It follows that to recognize a featherless biped or dolphin or Martian as a person requires that one think thoughts of the form 'We (one) shall do (or abstain from doing) actions of kind A in circumstances of kind C'. To think thoughts of this kind is not to *classify* or *explain*, but to *rehearse an intention*.

(Sellars 1963: 39–40)

In Hegelian fashion, Sellars insists that what individuates *persons* is not just a description of their practices but also an account of how those practices convey persons' sensitivity to a normative community; the ways in which persons are sensitive to fellow language-using agents. For Quill Kukla (writing as Rebecca Kukla) and Mark Lance, 'Sellars is getting at the point that recognizing someone as a person is not merely an observative act, but also a practical act of the second kind ... We become and remain the types of beings that have specific, agent-relative engagements with others through an ongoing network of hails and acknowledgments' (Kukla and Lance 2009: 180–181). Equally, epistemic kinds are not discrete, purely representational kinds that can be broken down into primitives, to the extent that epistemic kinds are articulated asocially. Speech-acts involved in playing the game of giving and asking for reasons 'are the acts they are in virtue of being planted within and constituted by a rich social and institutional context' (Kukla and Lance 2016: 86). Any commitment to the social dimension of knowledge attribution must involve a commitment to viewing the fixation of belief, to use Peirce's term, as something that cannot be achieved independently of practices of inquiry. Since knowledge attribution is a normative practice through and through, it is necessarily social, as norms can only be meaningfully established through deliberative discourse in order to be deemed authoritative, legitimate and valid for those engaging in such discourse.

According to Sellars, because norms are 'social achievements' (Brandom 2002: 216), established by the *intersubjective* epistemic practices between agents, norms get their normative purchase – namely, their *rational bindingness* – by virtue of being assented to and acknowledged by a community of discursive agents. To quote Steven Levine here, 'norms have no existence outside of their being taken as correct or incorrect – as being authoritative or not – by a community of persons' (Levine 2019: 253). Crucially, though, the practice of assenting to and acknowledging normative constraints and normative entitlements comprises determining the content of norms 'through a "process of *negotiation*" involving ourselves *and* those who attribute norms to us' (Houlgate 2007: 139). By virtue of being a process of *negotiation*, norms and identities are never *fixed* but always subject to 'further assessment, challenge, defence, and correction' (Brandom 1994: 647). As such, for Sellars, one replaces the model of conceptual analysis with a normative pragmatic framework: *knowing is a recognizable standing in the normative space of reasons*.

I think a crucial motivation for Sellars's move here is not simply his staunch Kantianism about normativity and meaning.¹² His pragmatic abandonment of the framework of analysis about knowledge in 1956 also seems to spring from a

prophetic concern with an apparently ossified noetic state of play:¹³ mainstream analytic epistemology's apparent inability to get over Gettier-style problematics since 1963 led to discursive banality in talk about knowledge. For, one either had to find a counter-example to Gettier cases that safely secured the third necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge; or one had to put forward a fourth necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge having recognized the hopelessness of the three-condition model. Since Sellars aligned himself in complex ways with the pragmatist tradition, I think one has good reason to suppose his critique of the project of analysis is in part a William James-inspired worry that normative epistemology was *talking* about normative matters in the wrong way. Overcoming the rigidity of conceptual analysis in this context would involve broadening one's conceptual vocabulary. As Sellars writes about the importance of expanding one's discursive repertoire:

The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term ... To achieve success in philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to 'know one's way around' with respect to all these things ... in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred.

(Sellars 1963: 1)

Such a vision of what philosophy looks like and what its particular mode of cognitive engagement aspires to achieve seems to be shared by Nicholas Rescher:

The definitive mission of philosophy is to provide a basis for understanding the world and our place within it as intelligent agents – with 'the world' understood comprehensively to encompass the realms of nature, culture, and artifice. The aim of the enterprise is to provide us with cognitive orientation for conducting our intellectual and practical affairs. And the data of philosophy by whose means this project must be managed include alike the observation-based science of reality, the imaginable realm of speculative possibility, and the normative manifold of evaluation. Given this massive mandate, the prime flaw of philosophizing is a narrowness of vision. Granted the issues are complex and specialisation becomes necessary. But its cultivation is never sufficient because the details must always be fitted into a comprehensive whole.

(Rescher 2017: 32)

A philosopher who achieves her proximate, localised ends at the cost of off-loading difficulties onto other sectors of the wider domain is simply not doing an adequate job. With rationally cogent philosophizing, it is not local minimalism but global optimalism that is required. To be acceptable, a philosophical problem-solution must form an integral part of a wider doctrine that makes acceptably good sense overall. Here only systemic, holistically attuned positions can yield truly satisfactory solutions – solutions that do not involve undue externalities for the larger scheme of things.

(Rescher 2017: 42)

Central to both Sellars's and Rescher's respective conceptions of the aims and task of philosophy is a commitment to *holism*. The kind of holism one can reasonably attribute to Sellars and Rescher is a Hegelian variety: in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (in)famously claimed that 'the True is the whole. However, the whole is only the essence completing itself through its own development' (PS, §20, 13). Here, the framework for understanding objects of experience is *not* restricted to the level of *ordinary* consciousness, where we can only make 'thin' judgements that express their atomistic separation and only an artificial kind of unity. Thinness, then, consists in failing to account for relations of identity-in-difference, the *interconnectedness yet basic* difference between objects. Hegel sees his absolute idealism as an expression of *philosophical* consciousness precisely because it aims to capture both the inherent unity of all finite things while crucially also preserving and maintaining their individuality. As he writes in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

For our ordinary consciousness (i.e., the consciousness at the level of sense-perception and understanding) the objects that it knows count as self-standing and self-founded in their isolation from one another, their mutual dependence on one another is regarded as something external to the object, and not as belonging to their nature. It must certainly be maintained against this that the objects of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances, i.e., they do not have the ground of their being within themselves, but within something else ... [T]he true situation is that the things of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances ... and that the proper determination of these things, which are in this sense 'finite' consists in having the ground of their being not within themselves but in the universal divine Idea.

(EL, §45 A, 88–89)¹⁴

Ordinary consciousness treats finite particulars as ultimate, absolute or self-explanatory simply because its framework does not allow it to go beyond what is immediately given to us in perception. However, Hegel's point is that if we are to *think philosophically*, we must be prepared to reject the metaphysical supposition that finite particulars are the only things that exist, that they can be adequately made sense of as atomistic and non-holistic, as well as the epistemic supposition that explanation is restricted to the standards of ordinary consciousness. Thus, the intellectual demand on rational agents aims to accommodate the reality of particulars and to maintain their dependence on structures, such as universals, in order to do justice to both the nature of determinate being and the standards of philosophical consciousness. This is why, for Hegel, a move from ordinary to philosophical consciousness consists in recognizing, to use Paolo Diego Bubbio's terminology, 'mediated objectivity' – 'an ongoing process of mediation between subject and object which is always already in place'.¹⁵ Rather than viewing reality as loosely connected sets of objects, we ought to conceive of Being as a complex and interconnected whole in which finite members are dialectically related.¹⁶ Such a move aims to supplant the perspective of *Verstand* (the understanding), with the perspective of *Vernunft* (reason) in discourse about sense-making.

For Hegel, the advantage of drawing this distinction between reason and understanding is that we can be in a position to not be wrapped up in the various dualisms which are the inevitable consequence of reflecting only from the perspective of *Verstand*, namely purely *analytical* forms of reflection. What *Vernunft* provides consciousness with is the means to avoid the pitfalls of dualisms and the problems of analysis by thinking dialectically, specifically, by drawing distinctions yet establishing interconnectedness to a whole:

This cognition is thus the recognition of this content and its form, and *liberation* from the one-sidedness of the forms and the elevation of them into the absolute form.

(EPM, §573, 267)¹⁷

What man seeks in this situation, ensnared here as he is in finitude on every side, is the region of a higher, more substantial, truth, in which all oppositions and contradictions in the finite can find their final resolution, and freedom its full satisfaction ... The highest truth, truth as such, is the resolution of the highest opposition and contradiction. In it validity and power are swept away from the opposition between freedom and necessity, between spirit and nature, between knowledge and its object, between law and impulse, from opposition and contradiction as such, whatever forms they make take. Their validity and power as opposition and contradiction is gone ... The ordinary consciousness, on the other hand, cannot extricate itself from this opposition and either remains despairingly in contradiction or else casts it aside and helps itself in some other way. But philosophy enters into the heart of the self-contradictory characteristics, knows them in their essential nature, i.e. as in their one-sidedness not absolute but self-dissolving, and it sets them in the harmony and unity which is truth. To grasp this Concept is the task of philosophy.

(LA I, 99–100)

The arguments Hegel gives in this engaging passage – namely that the task of philosophy is to lead our ways of understanding all aspects of our world away from purely dualistic and oppositional ways of thinking, and to enable us to reflect on the intelligibility of both difference and unity in our world – serve as a powerful critique of strategies that ignore (whether wilfully or not) the philosophical nature of certain problematics. If one applies this general metaphilosophical riposte to the development of strict scientific naturalism since Quine in the Anglo-American world, I think there is good reason to suppose Hegel would agree with the following claim by Lynne Baker, namely that ‘scientific naturalism often seems like a change of subject that lacks respect for the peculiar projects and puzzles that traditionally occupy philosophers’ (Baker 2013: 101).

Crucially, however, the lack of respect for the peculiarity and *sui generis* features of the normative space of reasons does not necessarily find its expression in only reductionist and eliminativist philosophical projects: the expressions finding a place

for mind in the natural world and making elbow room for intentionality in the world described by physics, which seem to be staples of more liberal and pluralistic conceptual attitudes, both seem to presuppose that one ought to accept from the very outset the vocabulary and general *Weltanschauung* of the natural sciences and then find some meaningful and coherent way of quite literally fitting in phenomena such as intentionality and normativity into that nomothetic picture. The Hegelian concern about such a model is a crisis of communication: the model remains locked in the viewpoint of the understanding and is therefore dialectically inhibited from *radically revising the very notion of how sense-making ought to be constituted and practised*. For all of the indisputably important and impressive noetic achievements of the natural sciences,¹⁸ the march to scientism constitutes a type of 'self-renunciation' and a failure of rationality.¹⁹ To quote Williams here:

We run the risk, in fact, that the whole humanistic enterprise of trying to understand ourselves is coming to seem peculiar. For various reasons, education is being driven towards an increasing concentration on the technical and the commercial, to a point at which any more reflective enquiry may come to seem unnecessary and archaic, something that at best is preserved as part of the heritage industry. If that is how it is preserved, it will not be the passionate and intelligent activity that it needs to be.

(Williams 2006: 198–199)

I think a particularly helpful way of seeing how this works is provided by reflecting on Hegel's arguments in 'Observing Reason'.

From 'Observing Reason' to discursive amphibians

The form of consciousness in this chapter of the *Phenomenology* is concerned with achieving at homeness in the world only through the natural sciences. Since the natural sciences are serving as *the* cognitive guide here, the phenomenological subject is interested in making sense of things only nomothetically, by subsuming individuals under general categories or universal laws of nature:

Formerly, it just happened to consciousness that it perceived and *experienced* quite a bit in the thing; however, here it itself makes the observations and engages the experience. Meaning something and perceiving, which formerly were sublated for us, are now sublated by consciousness for consciousness itself. Reason sets out to *know* the truth, and what was a thing for meaning-something and perceiving is now to be found as a concept, which is to say, reason is to have in thinghood only the consciousness of itself. Reason thus now has a universal *interest* in the world because it is the certainty of having its present moment in the world, or is certain that the present is rational. It seeks its other, while knowing that it possesses nothing else in that other but itself; it seeks only its own infinity.

(PS, §240, 142)²⁰

However, the practice of purely observing nature and aiming to ‘carve reality at the joints’ through the exercise of nomothetic rationality quickly sees the phenomenological subject finding *Verstand* rationally unsatisfying. As Hegel writes:

Observation, which kept [its biological categories] apart in orderly fashion and believed that in them it had hold of something fixed, sees one principle reaching out over and across another, sees disarray and transitions forming themselves, and sees something combined in this one which it at first took to be utterly separated, and sees something separated which it had counted as belonging together ... the observing, in clinging tenaciously to motionless self-consistent being, must see itself here teased with cases that rob it of every determination, which silence the universality it has reached, and which set it back again to unthinking observing and describing.

(PS, §247, 146–147)

For Hegel, to properly develop a conception of nature, one must go beyond a particular kind of empiricism, namely an empiricism that only, as Cinzia Ferrini notes, ‘analyzes objects by distinguishing and isolating their various features, [where] these features [then] acquire the form of universality by being separated. Yet this highlights the first inconvenience of description, the superficiality of abstracting universals from particulars and then consequent instability and arbitrariness of these general forms under which things are merely subsumed’ (Ferrini 2009: 92–93).

Hegel’s critique of *Verstand* is made especially complex by how he seems to blend his metaphysical concerns about a non-dialectical relationship between the categories of individuality/universality/particularity with a phenomenologico-hermeneutic concern about the practices of nomothetic inquiry *simpliciter*. However, while Hegel’s objections to abstract universality are well documented in the literature, there seems to be comparatively less attention devoted to his objection to the practice of observation. For example, Robert Stern’s analysis of ‘Observing Reason’ principally focuses on Hegelian worries about universals but only hints at what might be construed as the more philosophically striking objection to scientific naturalism in that chapter of the *Phenomenology*: ‘Observing Reason thus finds itself constructing laws that are increasingly general and removed from the concreteness of the experimental situation’ (Stern 2013: 123).

An advantage of diagnosing scientism amongst others as cognitive pathologies lies in how the one-sided conceptual structure that constitutes the framework of scientism reveals underpinnings of the eliminativist and reductionist attitudes that serve as steering drives of nomothetic practice. I think one has compelling reason to think that scientific positions such as eliminativism exhibit marked degrees of anthropological self-loathing, to the extent that the desire for a purely nomothetic account of the world conveys a fear of complexity and a corresponding repugnance to the necessarily qualitative features of embeddedness and embodiment. Such theories, as Rescher writes, ‘turn Occam’s razor into Robespierre’s guillotine’ (Rescher 2017: 40). From a Hegelian-Husserlian perspective, purging the lifeworld of all its idiosyncratic and unique *Geistig* features, to quote Tim Mooney, involves

a self-refuting 'secularised Platonism', for scientism necessarily presupposes the grammar of the lifeworld in an effort to excise it in favour of the pure scientific image. As Robert Hanna argues, 'the basic natural sciences, as rational human cognitive achievements, and also natural scientists themselves, as fully engaging in pre-exact-scientific and trans-exact-scientific human rationality at every moment of their conscious and self-conscious lives, are necessarily irreducible to the physical facts known by those very sciences and those very scientists' (Hanna 2014: 756).

For Hegel, what distinguishes *Geist* from mere *Natur* (Nature) is self-consciousness and the ways in which intentional and goal-driven self-reflexive action renders human beings as thoroughly active in the world. Such a position would be illustrative of Kant's notion of *pragmatic anthropology*, which crucially draws a distinction between *die Welt kennen* and *Welt haben*: 'the expressions "to know the world" and "to have the world" are rather far from each other in their meaning, since one only *understands* the play that one has watched, while the other has *participated* in it' (Kant 2006: [120], 4). To quote Terry Pinkard: 'on Hegel's view, one acts in terms of the nature of that to which one concretely first-personally refers, that is, to oneself and to one's own nature as having practical reason embedded within it' (Pinkard 2012: 184).²¹ *Geist*, as mutual cognitive relationships between agents, sees personhood constituted intersubjectively.²² Socialization involves not just grasping the Gricean norms of assertion but also knowing how to *move* in the normative space of reasons. Successful navigation in the space of reasons requires grasping the plurality of inferential commitments and entitlements one has in the communicative use of concepts. Emphasis on communication as an intersubjectively constituted performative act transforms the subject from being an observer/voyeur to being a speaker and hearer.²³

Understood in this Hegelian way, arguably the most pressing problem with the framework of nomothetic reason as exhaustive of inquiry is that the erasure of '*self-conscious thinking*' (EPM, §572, 267), namely the first-person intentional perspective and the intersubjective dimension of rational agency, leaves humanity in the grip of a voyeuristic picture. As Williams notes as well: 'What would be scientific would be an *a priori* assumption that ... identified linguistic behaviour as independent of human cultural activities in general, or, alternatively, took the differently reductive line, that cultural activities are all or mostly to be explained in terms of natural selection' (Williams 2006: 188). The attempt to translate the vocabulary of the manifest image into the vocabulary of the pure and ideal scientific image²⁴ amounts to a debilitating variety of alienation in which humanity is estranged from its *geistig* and therefore necessarily pluralist matrix of sense-making practices.

However, recognizing the heterogeneity of the manifest image and the normative space of reasons in no way entails conceiving of intentionality, amongst others as 'imaginary skyhooks' (Baker 2013: xxii). On the contrary, it deepens our way of viewing reality as intelligible by doing justice to our *geistige Einstellung*, our Hegelian status as *discursive amphibians*. Though Hegel does not obviously suggest his amphibian analogy applies to constantly shifting between space-of-reason-discourse and space-of-nature-discourse, I think there is sufficient reason to believe the analogy also holds in this context:

Taken quite abstractly, it is the *opposition* of universal and particular, when each is fixed over against the other on its own account in the same way; more concretely, it appears in nature as the opposition of the abstract law to the abundance of individual phenomena, each explicitly with its own character; in the spirit it appears as the *contrast* between the sensuous and the spiritual in man, as the *battle* of spirit against flesh, of duty for duty's sake, of the cold command against particular interest, warmth of heart, sensuous inclinations and impulses, against the individual dispositions in general; as the harsh *opposition* between inner freedom and the necessity of external nature, further as the *contradiction* between the dead inherently empty concept, and the *full concreteness* of life, between theory and subjective thinking, and objective existence and experience. These are *oppositions* which have not been invented at all by the *subtlety of reflection* or the pedantry of philosophy; in numerous forms they have always preoccupied and troubled the human consciousness, even if it is modern culture that has first worked them out most sharply and driven them up to the peak of *harshest contradiction*. Spiritual culture, the modern intellect, produces this *opposition* in man which makes him an *amphibious animal*, because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another ... If general culture has run into such a *contradiction*, it becomes the task of philosophy to supersede the *oppositions*, i.e. to show that neither the one alternative in its abstraction, nor the other in the like one-sidedness, possesses truth, but that they are both self-dissolving; that truth lies only in the reconciliation and mediation of both, and that this mediation is no mere demand, but what is absolutely accomplished and is ever self-accomplishing. This insight coincides immediately with the ingenuous faith and will which does have precisely this dissolved opposition steadily present to its view, and in action makes it its end and achieves it. *Philosophy affords a reflective insight* into the essence of the opposition only in so far as it shows how truth is just the dissolving of opposition and, at that, not in the sense, as may be supposed, that the opposition and its two sides do not exist at all, *but that they exist reconciled*.

(LA I, 53–55; emphasis added)

Hegel places significant emphasis on the dialectical function of *Vernunft*, which does not conceive of rational activity as a detached, voyeuristic critical reason. Why *Vernunft* is favoured here over analytical reflection is that *Verstand* fails to be completely illustrative of our *geistige Einstellung*. It also fails to adequately make sense of 'what reflective attitude to take to our own conceptions' (Williams 2006: 191) – namely, our sense of ourselves as engaging in multifaceted forms of inquiry. In this respect, then, I think two important points should be noted.

First, central to Hegel's project of reconciliation is celebrating difference, where the logic of reconciliation, *contra* Adorno, is designed to prohibit any form of repression of difference. For Adorno, what is symptomatic of Western metaphysics is the apparent long-standing philosophical tradition of prioritizing universality over individuality, a tradition that begins with Plato and is fully actualized in Hegelian thought.²⁵

However, such metaphysical prioritization is regarded by Adorno as harmful: the practice of conceptualization in terms of bringing things under general descriptions and rule following is an *intrinsically violent and authoritarian practice*,²⁶ as difference is obliterated by the system's demand for reconciled unity. Since *Begriffe* function to seize the things they are directed at,²⁷ the activity of making sense of things through the application of rule-conforming concepts does not respect the integrity of Being; rather, if anything, this particular genus of discursivity is effectively some kind of *viol cognitif*, where reality is forced to conform to concepts. Such violence translates into a form of eerie conservatism, as subsuming things under general terms leads one to assimilate 'all individuals into a general type, and thereby exclude or devalue their difference or singularity' (Stern 2009: 367). Ironically, then, it seems Adorno can be regarded as turning Hegelian metaphysics on its head. For, in an effort to distinguish his objective idealism from Schelling's objective idealism, Hegel (in)famously claimed that Schellingian monism left one with a view of Being in terms of 'the night in which, as one says, all cows are black' (PS, §16, 12).

While Hegel's project of reconciliation necessarily is committed to a dialectical relationship between universality, particularity and individuality, it does not thereby follow that Hegel is committed to the kind of absolute monism he attributed to Schelling: in the opening stages of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel makes use of Spinoza's 'All Determination is Negation' in an effort to reject precisely what Adorno accuses him of doing: the negation that accompanies determination is *a necessary condition for the possibility of being in any genuine sense*. In other words, Hegel claims that if anything is to be, then it must have determination and so negation, otherwise reality is essentially undifferentiated and undifferentiating. His argument can be understood as follows: for anything to be more than just a completely formal and abstract pure being, which for Hegel is the same as nothingness, there must be some kind of determination. Such determination must involve some negation. The significance of difference and determinate negation also reveals that Hegel's project of reconciliation is deeply *anti-domination*.²⁸ As Hegel writes in the *Differenzschrift*:

To cancel established oppositions is the sole interest of reason. *But this interest does not mean that it is opposed to opposition and limitation in general*; for necessary opposition is one factor of life, which forms itself by eternally opposing itself, and in the *highest liveliness* totality is possible only through restoration from the *deepest fission*.

(DIFF., 91; emphasis added)

This is perhaps the crucial issue that Adorno's critique of Hegel appears either to neglect or misunderstand. The notion of reconciliation and wholeness that Hegel espouses is *not* one which aims to collapse difference into identity or translate talk about individuals into talk about general kinds, but rather aims to undermine a *non*-dialectical approach to dualities such as universality and individuality:

When people speak of the Concept, they ordinarily have only abstract universality in mind, and consequently the Concept is usually also defined as a general notion.

We speak in this way of the 'concept' of colour, or of a plant, or of an animal, and so on; and these concepts are supposed to arise by omitting the particularities through which the various colours, plants, animals, etc. are distinguished from one another, and holding fast to what they have in common. This is the way in which the understanding apprehends the Concept, and the feeling that such concepts are hollow and empty, that they are mere schemata and shadows, is justified. What is universal about the Concept is indeed not just something common against which the particular stands on its own; instead the universal is what particularises (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, with unclouded clarity. (EL, §164 A, 240)

Understood in this way, Hegel could claim that Adorno is guilty of approaching the subject of reconciliation and universality and individuality in *exactly* the sort of way Hegel rejects, namely from the perspective of thinking either universality is *prior* to individuality or individuality is *prior* to universality, rather than from the perspective of thinking of universality and individuality as *interdependent*. So, rather than view Hegel's project of reconciliation as a monochromatic monism, as having no interest in difference, one ought to regard Hegel's project of reconciliation as advocating a polychromatic pluralism. As Charlotte Baumann rightly claims, 'it is precisely Hegel's intention to develop a conception of a whole which constitutes different entities and allows for their free existence within it, rather than destroying them' (Baumann 2011: 90).

Second, for Hegel, the amphibian analogy demands that one must go beyond a particular kind of naturalism, namely a *narrow* naturalism which *alienates us from ourselves*. The notion of self-alienation is crucial for making sense of Hegel's concern about *one-sidedness*: as I previously wrote, one has compelling reason to think that scientific positions such as eliminativism exhibit marked degrees of anthropological self-loathing, to the extent that the desire for a purely nomothetic account of the world conveys a fear of complexity and a corresponding abhorrence of embeddedness and embodiment. *Geist*, under nomothetic grips, suffers from *Gattungswesen-Entfremdung* (species-essence alienation), where the species-essence refers to the plurality of powers and capacities human beings naturally have. A crucial feature of our species-essence is our status as *discursive amphibians*:

in the spiritual nature of man duality and inner conflict burgeon, and in their *contradiction* he is *tossed about*. For in the inner as such, in pure thought, in the world of laws and their universality man cannot hold out; he needs also sensuous existence, feeling, the heart, emotion, etc. The *opposition*, which therefore arises, philosophy thinks as it is in its thoroughgoing universality, and proceeds to the cancellation of the same in a similarly universal way ... Consequently, man strives further in the realm of spirit to obtain satisfaction and freedom in knowing and willing, in learning and actions. The ignorant man is not free, because what confronts him is an alien world, something outside him and in the offing, on which he depends, without his having made this foreign world for himself and therefore *without being at home in it by himself as in something his own*. The impulse of

curiosity, the pressure for knowledge, from the lowest level up to the highest rung of philosophical insight arises only from the *struggle to cancel this situation of unfreedom and to make the world one's own in one's ideas and thought.*

(LA I, 97–98; emphasis added)

The attraction of the dialectical function of *Vernunft* is *not* the overcoming of opposition as such, but rather the overcoming of the alienation that we necessarily experience as a result of *one-sidedness*, which prevents us from being at home with *ourselves* and therefore subjectively incapable of achieving at homeness with the *world*. Understood in such a manner, I think it is reasonable to think of Hegel's concern here, to some extent, in *proto*-Nietzschean ways: *Gattungswesen-Entfremdung* is estrangement from *Geistigkeit* as Dionysian and Apollonian. For Nietzsche, Dionysus represents the drive towards transcending fragmented, modern individuated self-consciousness, whereas Apollo represents the drive towards individuation and discreteness:

Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind ... The individual, with all his limits and measure, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac condition and forgot the statutes of Apollo. Excess revealed itself as the truth; contradiction, bliss born of pain, spoke of itself from out of the heart of nature. Thus, wherever the Dionysiac broke through, the Apolline was suspended and annulled.

(Nietzsche 1999: 18, 27)

One might even describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis* ... this deification of individuation knows just one law: the individual, which is to say, respect for the limits of the individual, *measure* in the Hellenic sense. As an ethical divinity Apollo demands measure from all who belong to him and, so that they may respect that measure, knowledge of themselves. Thus the aesthetic necessity of beauty is accompanied by the demands: 'Know thyself' and 'Not too much!'; whereas getting above oneself and excess were regarded as the true hostile demons of the non-Apolline sphere.

(Nietzsche 1999: 18, 27)

While it would be a stretch to claim that Hegel's own seeming fondness for Dionysian revelry²⁹ is the same as Nietzsche's quasi-psychoanalytic concern about the suppression of the Dionysian self-image in favour of governance by the Apollonian self-image, I would argue that what Rayound Geuss argues in the following passage about the Dionysian and Apollonian is applicable to Hegel's dynamical characterization of our discursive architecture: 'although these two impulses are in some sense opposed to each other, they generally coexist in any given human soul, institution, work of art, etc. ... It is precisely the tension between the two of them that is particularly creative. The task is to get them into a productive relation to each other' (Geuss 1999: xi).

However, given the difference between the natural sciences and philosophy *in terms of how they respectively make sense of things*, I think it would be incorrect to suppose

that the natural sciences and philosophy should be understood in terms of a *geistig* hierarchy. This is because the way in which art makes sense of things is so *different* to the way in which philosophy makes sense of things: conceived in this way, one ought not to regard the natural sciences and philosophy as rival forms of intelligibility competing with one another to best satisfy our desire for understanding our world. On the contrary, they should be seen as *complementary reflective practices*, practices that are jointly indispensable for adequately and holistically engaging with our environment. Not only that, part of what makes the category of philosophy *sui generis* and significant is how philosophy enables '*self-conscious thinking*' (EPM, §572, 267). The answer, then, to the question 'what might philosophy become?' involves philosophy as not monogamous with the *Naturwissenschaften* but discursively polyamorous with both the natural sciences *and* cultural theory. To quote Williams here:

I very much prefer that we should retain the category of philosophy and situate ourselves within it, rather than pretend that an enquiry which addresses these issues with a richer and more imaginative range of resources represents 'the end of philosophy'. The traditions of philosophy demand that we reflect on the presuppositions of what we think and feel. The claim which I am making, from here, from inside the subject, is that in certain areas, at least, this demand itself cannot be adequately met unless we go beyond the conceptions of getting it right that are too closely associated with the inexpressive models drawn, perhaps unconsciously, from the sciences ... We can dream of a philosophy that would be thoroughly truthful and honestly helpful ... It would need resources of expressive imagination to do almost any of the things it needed to do.

(Williams 2006: 211–212)

Such a view can *easily* be misunderstood, so I would like to clarify some points here: this notion of *post-analytic* philosophy is not meant to involve any *postmodern* contempt for the achievements and authority of the natural sciences in favour of a totalizing valorization of literary theory and hermeneutics. In other words, I am not advocating a reversal of a hierarchical epistemic power relation that sees the 'tyranny of scientism' replaced by the 'tyranny of cultural theory'. Rather, the move to post-analytic philosophy is meant to *expand the discursive vocabulary* available to inquirers: crucially, such creative and imaginative expansion for coordinating discourse is very much wedded to the interest of 'getting it right'.

According to Rorty, 'Brandom's work can usefully be seen as an attempt to usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage' (Rorty 1997: 8–9). What Rorty means here is prophetic, but not entirely clear. Even so, I think he is making a thought-provoking point: in perhaps an ironic way, analytic philosophy is much like *Geist* in the *Phenomenology*, namely it is fallible and moves through various stages and positions in an attempt to achieve rational satisfaction. Where the analytic tradition once aimed to achieve rational satisfaction by admonishing Hegel, its slow and steady rapprochement with Hegel indicates a self-directed need to creatively and imaginatively re-evaluate its web of beliefs.³⁰

Crucially, though, from my perspective, analytic philosophy's 'Hegelian stage', the broad extension of 'post-analytic philosophy', would not be identifiable with a mere acceptance or adoption of Hegelian ideas and total contempt for Russell. Rather, what such a stage would in fact involve is a gradual removal of arbitrary and fixed divisions. Hegel, therefore, provides the clues to a much broader metaphilosophical paradigm shift in the analytic tradition, a paradigm shift that goes beyond Hegelianism becoming hegemonic in analytic thinking.

This is what I take to signify by the 'Hegelian stage' of analytic philosophy, the broad extension of 'post-analytic philosophy', whose *telos* of amphibious inquiry is beautifully envisioned by Sellars, who writes:

Or does the reader not recognise Jones as Man himself in the middle of his journey from the grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study, the language of Henry and William James, of Einstein and of the philosophers who, in their efforts to break out of discourse to an *arche* beyond discourse, have provided the most curious dimension of all?

(Sellars 1997: §63)

Notes

- 1 The expression 'the Anglo-American analytic tradition' should not be construed as an intellectual monolithic bloc that is an *idée fixe* since its 'founding' at the turn of the twentieth century. As Hans-Johann Glock (2008) has recently argued, analytic philosophy is a complex historical tradition tied and 'should be explained in terms of *family resemblances*. What holds analytic philosophers together is not a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but a thread of overlapping similarities (doctrinal, methodological and stylistic). Thus current analytic philosophers may be tied to Frege and Russell in their logical methods, or to logical positivism and Quine in their respect for science, or to Wittgenstein and linguistic philosophy in their concern with the *a priori*, meaning and concepts, etc.' (Glock 2008: 19). The following from Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom is also worth noting here: 'Analytic philosophy is a term which is used with varying degrees of precision. Most generally, it is used to refer to the whole tradition of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. But aside from this purely historical-geographical usage, there is a more precise meaning which tries to describe a type and style of philosophy which is seen as: rooted in logical argument; having the philosophy of language and meaning as its primary subject matter; striving for rigour; and taking as its model scientific enquiry rather than literary or artistic expression' (Baggini and Stangroom 2002: 238).
- 2 See Stich (1990), Jackson (1998), Kornblith (2002), Kauppinen (2007), Sosa (2007), Murphy and Bishop (2009), Cappelen (2012), Ichikawa (2012), Haug (2013), Sytsma and Livengood (2015), Nado (2016), D'Oro and Overgaard (2017), Sytsma and Buckwalter (2016) and Machery (2017).
- 3 Michael Quante (2004) provides a very helpful framework for discussing the second debate: in its narrowest sense, the conception of philosophy as therapeutic

claims that the function of philosophy solely consists in curing misunderstandings engendered by philosophical mistakes. In a wider sense, the conception of philosophy as therapeutic claims that the function of philosophy consists in curing misunderstandings engendered by both the mistakes of philosophers and the mistakes of non-philosophers. With regard to 'constructive' philosophy, which Quante regards as equivalent to conceiving of philosophy as a problem-solving discipline, Quante draws four further distinctions: (1) in the *pejorative* sense, this model of philosophy creates the problems that necessarily require therapeutic treatment by mistaking philosophical problematics for real/genuine problems; (2) in its *narrow* sense, constructive philosophy provides solutions for real problems within common sense that pose genuine threats to the good life; (3) in its *wider* sense, constructive philosophy goes further in wanting to provide a philosophical framework to support the assumptions of common sense, even when those assumptions are not the cause for various aporias; and (4) in its *revisionary* sense, constructive philosophy aims to replace common sense, which it regards to be entirely bankrupt. See McDowell (1994), Rorty (2010) and Giladi (2015) for further on this topic.

- 4 See Papineau (1993), De Caro and Macarthur (2004, 2010), Ritchie (2008) and Giladi (2019a).
- 5 Williams gave the Inaugural Lecture at the Centre for Post-Analytic Philosophy at Southampton University in November 1997.
- 6 There is some similarity but also some difference between my cluster and the original cluster comprising the first collection of writings on post-analytic philosophy by Rajchman and West (1985), which regards Rorty as the *paradigmatic* post-analytic philosopher. As far as I am aware, the only other volume on post-analytic philosophy is Reynolds et al. (2010). See also the following from Williams: 'it is particularly important that "post-analytic" should not be understood in terms of the supposed distinction between analytic and continental philosophy. I say this as one who is, both deniably and undeniably, an analytic philosopher: deniably, because I am disposed to deny it, and undeniably, because I suspect that few who have anything to say on the subject will accept that denial. What I do want to deny is the helpfulness of the distinction itself, and I shall mark that in particular by saying very little about it. But it is worth emphasising that what is unhelpful in this contrast goes beyond the matter of the unfortunate labels it uses' (Williams 2006: 201).
- 7 The following from George Duke, Elena Walsh, James Chase and Jack Reynolds is helpful here: 'The term "postanalytic" has been used to characterise the work of thinkers who, having started out in the mainstream analytic tradition, came to place in question some of its central presuppositions' (Duke et al. 2010: 7). Construed in such a manner, one may now wonder where Quine fits into the cluster here, for Quine played arguably the most important role in moving analytic philosophy out of its Carnapian phase with his critique of the analytic/synthetic distinction, his critique of semantic reductionism and his articulation of ontological relativity and the indeterminacy of translation. More to the point, Quine *self-described as post-analytic*. However, for all of Quine's radical dismantling of the two dogmas of empiricism and his break from Carnap and analyticity, Quine's strict and conservative variety of naturalism and conception of philosophy as the abstract arm of empirical science means that he is a *different kind of post-analytic philosopher* to Bernstein amongst others. Another sketch of post-analytic philosophy is provided by Christopher Norris, who writes: 'What chiefly unites [various ideas and movements of thought

under the broad rubric of “post-analytic” philosophy] – on the negative side – is a growing dissatisfaction with the analytic enterprise as it developed in the wake of logical empiricism. That project is now taken to have failed in all its main objectives, amongst them more recently the attempt to develop a truth-theoretic compositional semantics for natural language and a theory of beliefs (or propositional attitudes) that would explain how speakers and interpreters display such remarkable – though everyday – powers of communicative grasp. These ideas have come under attack from many quarters during the past two decades. Most influential here has been Quine’s assault on the two “last dogmas” of empiricism and – supposedly following from that – his case for ontological relativity and meaning-holism as the only way forward in default of any method for individuating objects or items of belief. The result, very often, is an attitude of deep-laid scepticism with regard to the truth-claims of science and the idea that philosophy might offer grounds – reasoned or explanatory grounds – for our understanding of language and the world’ (Norris 1997: x). ‘What these approaches share is a sense that philosophy has now arrived at a stage – with its holistic turn against any version of the logical-empiricist paradigm – where talk of “truth” (as hitherto conceived) becomes pretty much redundant. That is to say, it either drops out altogether (as in Rorty’s neopragmatist appeal to what is “good in the way of belief”), or else figures merely as a product of formal definition’ (Norris 1997: 2). ‘Such is at least one sense of the term “post-analytic philosophy”: the quest for an alternative to that entire tradition of thought, starting out from logical empiricism, whose upshot – after so much critical labour – would seem to be either a formalised (semantic or metalinguistic) theory of truth devoid of explanatory content, or on the other hand a pragmatist conception that reduces truth to the currency of in-place consensus belief’ (Norris 1997: 6). While some of what Norris writes about post-analytic philosophy is helpful, my concern is that (a) Norris misconstrues Quine’s critique of logical empiricism as undermining the epistemic authority of the natural sciences; and (b) Norris’s reliance on Rorty’s pragmatist-cum-deconstructionist critique of analytic philosophy as the exemplar of the post-analytic risks post-analytic philosophers such as Williams and Haack being seen as *postmodernist* thinkers.

- 8 The way I have characterized post-analytic philosophy in the broad sense differs from how Glock articulates the concept: ‘continental philosophy presented by Anglophone commentators who refer to analytic thinkers like Wittgenstein, Quine and Davidson (e.g. Taylor, Cavell and Mulhall)’ (Glock 2008: 256).
- 9 S knows that *p* iff:
 1. *p* is true
 2. S believes that *p*
 S is justified in believing that *p*.
- 10 S knows that *p* iff:
 1. *p* is true
 2. S believes that *p*
 3. S would believe that *p* if *p* was true
 4. S would not believe that *p* if *p* was false.
 See Nozick (1983).
- 11 See Williamson (2000).
- 12 There is a sizeable literature on this subject. See McDowell (1994), Brandom (2000), O’Shea (2007, 2009, 2016) and deVries (2009) in particular.

- 13 Pragmatists, whether classical, neo or new, tend to articulate polemical views about mainstream Anglo-American philosophy as well as mainstream Continental European philosophy.
- 14 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Geraets, Suchting and Harris' translation.
- 15 Bubbio (2016: 238–239).
- 16 Cf. Hegel, 'In our ordinary way of thinking, the world is only an aggregate of finite existences' (EPN, §247, 16). Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* is quoted according to Petry's translation.
- 17 The *Philosophy of Mind (Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830))* is quoted according to Wallace and Miller's translation (1971).
- 18 As Sellars writes: 'in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not' (Sellars 1997: §41).
- 19 Cf. the following by Alex Rosenberg: 'we'll call the worldview that all us atheists ... share "scientism". This is the conviction that the methods of science are the only reliable ways to secure knowledge of anything; that science's description of the world is correct in its fundamentals; and that when "complete", what science tells us will not be surprisingly different from what it tells us today' (Rosenberg 2011: 6–7). See also Wilson (1998). However, it is important to note that one can be an atheist without being committed to scientism. The 'scientism wars' are frustrating, principally because on one side there are hermeneutic humanists who think that naturalists *tout court* are denying discourse-pluralism; and on the other side there are scientistic naturalists who think hermeneutic humanists are denying that, in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things. Because the unity of science thesis, whether reductionist or eliminativist, is *not* grounded in a careful examination of scientific practice, it risks opening the door to the charge of scientism. However, if one considers *those philosophers of science who are looking at science in terms of practices*, such as John Dupré, Nancy Cartwright, Steven Horst and Joseph Rouse, a careful explication of how scientific practices yield a pragmatically efficacious grip on reality, there is reason to reject any top-down commitments to the unity of science (as for example driven by some *a priori* commitment to mechanistic physics as the epistemic ideal of inquiry). But, once one sees that pragmatic realism in philosophy of science does not entail – and in fact, strictly speaking, undermines – the unity of science thesis, 'scientism' just becomes a chimera. Given this, the following pertinent question arises: 'why, from a diagnostic perspective, does scientism still persist?' Scientism is, therefore, peculiar because it persists *despite* resting on implausible grounds, since 'the omnipresent neo-Pythagoreanism of contemporary science is surely not adequately justified by its empirical successes' (Dupré 1995: 224). I think a particularly compelling answer to this question involves explaining scientism's persistence in terms of scientism's status as the theoretical concomitant of the kind of social pathologies caused by the ideological exercise of formal reason in capitalist modes of production.
- 20 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is quoted according to Pinkard and Baur's translation.
- 21 For further on this subject, see Rödl (2007).
- 22 Cf. PS, §182, 111–112.
- 23 See Giladi (2019b) for further on this.

- 24 For example, what Daniel Dennett calls 'heterophenomenology'. I regard heterophenomenology as a sophisticated right-wing Sellarsian position.
- 25 Viz. Adorno (2000: 79).
- 26 Viz. Adorno (1981: 142–143).
- 27 The German term for 'concept', *Begriff*, comes from the verb *Begreifen*, which in turn I derived from *Greifen*. 'Greifen' is often translated as meaning 'to grab' / 'to grip' / 'to seize' / 'to snatch' / 'to capture' / 'to strike' / 'to take hold' / 'to bite'.
- 28 See Giladi (2020) for further on this.
- 29 Viz. PS, §47, 29.
- 30 As Rorty writes: 'philosophers in non-anglophone countries typically think quite hard about Hegel, whereas the rather skimpy training in the history of philosophy which most analytic philosophers receive often tempts them to skip straight from Kant to Frege. It is agreeable to imagine a future in which the tiresome "analytic-Continental split" is looked back upon as an unfortunate, temporary breakdown of communication – a future in which Sellars and Habermas, Davidson and Gadamer, Putnam and Derrida, Rawls and Foucault, are seen as fellow-travellers on the same journey, fellow-citizens of what Michael Oakeshott called a *civitas pelegrina*' (Rorty 1997: 11).

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Hegel in Dialogue with Contemporary Metaphilosophy

Giovanna Miolli

Introduction

The nature of philosophy is central to Hegel. While detaching himself from alternative accounts of how philosophy should be understood and conducted, Hegel builds his speculative system on the idea of philosophy's scientificity and self-determination. It would thus seem obvious that he does develop a metaphilosophy, namely a conception of what philosophy is (or should be).

However, to talk about Hegel's metaphilosophy might sound anachronistic and possibly inappropriate. As it is currently understood, metaphilosophy – a specific research field that has only arisen in the second half of the twentieth century and which is strongly connected to philosophy as an institutionalized discipline – encompasses at first glance a completely different ground when compared to the Hegelian landscape.

Against this backdrop, I shall attempt to elucidate in what sense Hegel does unfold a metaphilosophy, while also seeking to provide a preliminary account of the way his position may productively interact with contemporary metaphilosophy.

In the first section, I will outline different meanings of the term 'metaphilosophy' as they emerge in the late 1960s. This will allow me to critically discuss in what sense Hegel's thought offers new insights into conceptual strategies. In the second part, I will then focus on three representative responses to the question whether Hegel develops a metaphilosophy. Either the argument is made that (1) metaphilosophy denotes a propaedeutic to philosophy which Hegel rejects; (2) Hegel's metaphilosophy regards the relationship between philosophy and its history; or (3) Hegel's metaphilosophy coincides with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a justification enterprise external to the system. The third part will bring the results of the first two sections together by clarifying whether contemporary metaphilosophical categories are applicable to the late Hegel and by defining the main structural characteristics of his metaphilosophy. Subsequently, I will suggest that Hegel offers a *sui generis* metaphilosophical outlook, where the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy is one of self-containment. Furthermore, I will indicate some contemporary issues that Hegel's metaphilosophy could help rediscuss, namely the distinction between descriptive

and prescriptive metaphilosophy, the methodological question in philosophy, the justification of normative assumptions via their transformation from immediate presuppositions to mediated results, and philosophy's rejection of neutrality and impartiality in favour of a commitment to thinking.

Why metaphilosophy? Some historical and conceptual coordinates

In response to contemporary philosophy's need for scientific legitimation and the construction of an adequate self-image, metaphilosophy as an *explicit* theorization of the nature of philosophy was introduced in the late 1960s (see Williamson 2007: ix). A significant step towards the establishment of this discipline was the launch of the journal *Metaphilosophy* in 1970.

Terrell Ward Bynum's idea to create such a journal evolved during the years he attended Richard Rorty's seminar at Princeton University. Rorty had presented and tested some of his thoughts that would later converge into *The Linguistic Turn*, which was first published in 1967. The historical-conceptual emergence of metaphilosophy thus takes place during a decisive time for philosophy: the advent of the linguistic turn. This situates metaphilosophy within the tension between what had begun to be identified as 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophy.¹

The title of Rorty's introduction in *The Linguistic Turn* is particularly telling: 'Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy' (Rorty [1967] 1992: 1). Even if Rorty refers to the context of linguistic philosophy, his analysis singles out some aspects characterizing the metaphilosophical investigation as a whole. Specifically, metaphilosophy focuses on philosophical attitudes and programmes that correspond to certain conceptions of the nature of philosophy and is especially committed to methodological questions. In this regard, two main inquiries can be made out: the first one focuses on the uncovering and questioning of the 'substantive theses' tacitly presupposed by a certain philosophical position (see Rorty [1967] 1992: 1). The second inquiry is concerned with the examination of the 'criteria for philosophical success' (Rorty [1967] 1992: 2), namely criteria that allow a rational agreement on what is philosophically satisfactory. Both aspects intersect within the question, can (philosophical) progress be made out, and how? One might ask: 'why [do] philosophers *think* they have made progress, and what criteria of progress [do] they employ' (Rorty [1967] 1992: 2)? Another approach can be made by recognizing progress, or at least change, in the activity of 'uncovering the presuppositions of those who think they have none' (Rorty [1967] 1992: 2). The second line of investigation also touches on the issue of agreement amongst philosophers and specifically regards 'the problem of finding a method which will produce' such an agreement (Rorty [1967] 1992: 19). As Rorty's analysis further shows, a metaphilosophical approach also raises questions on the matter of the future of philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines, and how certain substantive philosophical theses closely interact with a specific metaphilosophical outlook (see Rorty [1967] 1992: 34–39).

These inquiries reflect the main topics of the metaphilosophical debate that has developed over the last fifty years. Generally speaking, metaphilosophy is conceived

as ‘the investigation of the nature of philosophy’ (Lazerowitz 1970: 91). This means exploring:

1. the mission, aims and objectives of philosophy;
2. the methods, tools, languages, jargons and procedures adopted by philosophy (this point is closely related to points 3 and 4);
3. philosophy’s relationship to other disciplines (the natural and social sciences in particular) and to society in general;
4. the issues of philosophy’s autonomy and objectivity (points 2 and 4 are directly linked to point 5);
5. philosophy’s prospects, progress and results.²

The question regarding the methods is a pivotal aspect of metaphilosophy: the assumption is that assessing the validity of (a particular) philosophy depends in a substantial way on the specific mode in which philosophizing is conducted. The choice of the philosophical method is considered to greatly impact philosophy’s capacity to progress and achieve results, and influences the appraisal of similarities and differences between philosophy and other disciplines. This issue is decisive for establishing whether philosophy has any chance to be autonomous in its own field or should be methodologically dependent on the natural and social sciences.³

In what follows, I will start exploring the landscape of contemporary metaphilosophy in more detail.

Prescriptive and descriptive metaphilosophy

Nicholas Rescher comments that: ‘Metaphilosophy has two dimensions. There is descriptive or historical metaphilosophy which provides an account of what has been thought regarding the conduct of philosophical inquiry, and there is prescriptive or normative metaphilosophy which deliberates about what is to be thought regarding the conduct of philosophizing’ (Rescher 2014: xi). An interesting reformulation of such distinction can be found in the book *Introduction to Metaphilosophy* (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013). The authors suggest classifying the metaphilosophical issues into three main questions: ‘What is philosophy? How should we do it? and Why should we do it?’ (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 11). They specify that such questions ‘are more interesting if they are interpreted as inviting *prescriptive* rather than descriptive replies’ (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 12).

Indeed, a descriptive answer could resolve the ‘What’ question conclusively: a ‘careful historical and sociological research’ would suffice to reconstruct ‘what past and present philosophers have understood their discipline to be, or what it has been in their hands’ (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 12). Rescher’s statement that purely historical metaphilosophy, unlike normative metaphilosophy, is not afflicted by disagreement and can pursue objective results is in line with this view (see Rescher 2014: xi–xii; 1985: 261–277).

By maintaining that the characteristics of philosophy can be solved in a historical-descriptive manner, these authors argue that an inquiry into its prescriptive nature

yields more meaningful results by asking 'what philosophy *should* be: should it be part of the natural sciences, or transcendental reflection, or conceptual analysis or what?' (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 12).

The very same operation applies to the other two cases. The question as to 'how philosophers proceed (and have proceeded) or what methods they (have) use(d)' is transformed into its prescriptive counterpart by investigating 'how they *ought* to proceed, what the *right* methods are' (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 12). Similarly, the question 'why [do] people philosophise' becomes (philosophically) more stimulating when inquiring 'whether there is any good reason to do philosophy, whether there is reason to think philosophy has any real value' (Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 13). According to Rescher, prescriptive metaphilosophy is (just as philosophy) exposed to disagreement and conflicts amongst different theories (see Rescher 2014: xi).

The distinction between prescriptive and descriptive metaphilosophy should not be taken as definitive. Rescher himself says that 'the two dimensions cannot be surgically separated, but they differ in matters of priority and emphasis' (Rescher 2014: xi): while descriptive metaphilosophy has a historical orientation, prescriptive metaphilosophy responds to a systematic intent. Despite this restriction on analytical divisiveness, I think that talking about the impracticability of a surgical separation may fall short of the actual problem, especially if descriptive and prescriptive metaphilosophy are identified with two different kinds of investigations: one afflicted by disagreement and the other one capable of (only) pursuing objective results. My point is that descriptive and prescriptive metaphilosophy, if we still wish to adopt such categories, interact in a 'osmotic' and co-constitutive modality, converging into one and the same inquiry, namely about philosophy's self-understanding.

Questioning the validity of the distinction between these two domains allows us to ponder if what *should* be thought and done can actually entirely disregard what has already been thought and done. The very history of philosophy could be an essential element of philosophy's *present* self-image: it could be a fundamental part of the present way philosophy is and of its normative claims. Even a philosopher who denied the previous tradition to advance a new conception of philosophy, by this very negation she would be integrating an implicit understanding of past philosophy – that is, a descriptive metaphilosophy – into her prescriptive metaphilosophy. Not only that: she would be reconstructing and evaluating past philosophy on the basis of certain prescriptive metaphilosophical criteria. Suggesting that past philosophers have not pursued philosophy in the right way would contribute to reinforcing and articulating her own conception of how philosophy should be done. Any case for a *creatio ex nihilo* seems therefore slim at best.

On the other hand, just as it seems hard to accept the idea of a *purely* normative metaphilosophy that completely abstracts from what has been previously thought and done, it seems equally difficult to imagine a *purely* descriptive and neutral metaphilosophy, void of any normative substantive theses, to use Rorty's terminology. If such a purely descriptive metaphilosophy were practicable, we should be able to reach a shared and uncontroversial description of past philosophical conceptions with regard to the 'What', 'How' and 'Why' of metaphilosophical questions. Nevertheless, this is obviously not the case.⁴

The relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy

The relationship between metaphilosophy and philosophy has been seen as controversial. As a first approximation, we can think of metaphilosophy as either an external observer of philosophy or as a participant within the sphere of philosophy directing the questions towards itself. Should one favour the first option, the need will arise to clarify the nature of the metaphilosophical inquiry, since it is not taken as distinctively philosophical. If the second alternative is endorsed, an explanation of how metaphilosophy is part of philosophy should follow.

To decide whether metaphilosophy is external or internal to philosophical activity means to formulate a specific interpretation of the prefix 'meta' placed before 'philosophy'. There are at least three possible readings: 'meta' as *beyond* or *above*; 'meta' as *about*; 'meta' as *after* or *post*. I shall now briefly analyse each option.

Metaphilosophy can be beyond or above philosophy as either an investigation *distinct* from philosophy, and thus different from and external to it, or as an investigation that includes, but also surpasses, philosophy. Bynum seems to endorse this latter position. When he had to choose the name for the journal he was creating, the term 'metaphilosophy' was the most suitable to identify 'something "above and beyond" philosophy, which can describe it, analyze it' (Bynum 2011: 187–188). If we are to interpret metaphilosophy as an activity *different* from, or wider than, philosophy, we could identify it with the act of putting philosophy into perspective to explain and compare diverse methods, movements, trends, etc. (though this would not really specify the nature of such activity). However, the problem remains whether this theoretical undertaking is generally possible on a *purely descriptive* level. Another question concerns the impact that such a non-philosophical analysis should have on philosophy.

Bynum's position is ambiguous in itself. While his statements adhere to the interpretation of the 'meta' as *beyond* – and thus refer to a field that, at least in part, exceeds philosophy – he does not seem to maintain that metaphilosophy is anything non-philosophical at the same time. Therefore, two problems persist: if we understand the terms 'above' and 'beyond' in an *exclusive* way, so as to conceive metaphilosophy as a theoretical operation different from philosophy, we must clarify what kind of analysis metaphilosophy would consist in and what relationship it entertains with the properly philosophical activity. If, instead, we construe the two terms in an *inclusive* way and think of metaphilosophy as a philosophical investigation in itself but also wider than philosophy, we must explain how it can be understood as something that is and simultaneously is not a philosophical enterprise.

Lazerowitz's position seems to avoid the amphibious nature of Bynum's proposal as he interprets metaphilosophy as an investigation distinct from philosophy and beyond it. On his view, metaphilosophy corresponds to the linguistic programme of dissolving philosophical problems by (re)converting philosophical statements into the ordinary language; whereas philosophy is conceptual analysis (see Lazerowitz 1964, 1970; see also Cooper 1965; Reese 1990: 28). Lazerowitz's account presents limitations because of the specific and restricted way of conceiving those two spheres. Against his position, one could argue that the whole philosophical tradition is not reducible to the method of conceptual analysis and what he takes to be metaphilosophy is itself a philosophical operation.⁵

Yet, metaphilosophy cannot just be seen as beyond or above philosophy but as an investigation *about* and *in* philosophy (Reese 1990; Joll 2017: section b). Most scholars consider metaphilosophy as a sub-discipline of philosophy, namely as 'the philosophical examination of the practice of philosophizing itself' (Rescher 2006: 1; see also Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood 2013: 8, 10; Rescher 2014: xi). This view is clearly voiced by Timothy Williamson whose position is curiously reversed from Bynum's. Williamson prefers speaking of the philosophy of philosophy, which 'is automatically part of philosophy ... whereas metaphilosophy sounds as though it might try to look down on philosophy from above, or beyond' (Williamson 2007: ix).

We can expand upon the interpenetration of philosophy and metaphilosophy by returning to Rorty's analysis. He sees a close interrelation between the adoption of certain substantive philosophical theses and the adoption of a certain metaphilosophical outlook. His observation highlights two aspects. Firstly, there is a (perhaps obvious) correlation between the development of a particular philosophy (as the actual implementation of a philosophical programme) and a certain metaphilosophical view (i.e. a conception of what philosophy or doing philosophy is). Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood (2013: 11) make the same point when they state that 'metaphilosophy is implicit in all philosophy'.

Secondly, there is a very close link between a certain metaphilosophical conception and the underlying substantive theses that govern the realization of a specific philosophical programme. One might even think that the two things coincide, namely that the former consists of a number of substantive theses that are then developed in, or guide the articulation of, the latter. If, however, we recall Rorty's indication that the questioning of the presuppositions (i.e. the substantive theses) of a certain philosophy is also part of the metaphilosophical investigation concerned with that philosophy, then it means that very same investigation should turn towards itself: it should explore the underlying substantive theses or presuppositions it consists of. It is precisely this aspect that makes it difficult to separate the metaphilosophical investigation from the 'mere' philosophical one. As I will argue, this is evident in Hegel's case, but it also concerns contemporary debates. As we have seen, the problem is to identify the level at which the metaphilosophical reflection is placed: is it part of philosophy or is it external to it? Assuming externality greatly complicates the question as it involves an infinite regress: if a certain metaphilosophy coincides with, or in any case is strictly related to, some substantive theses that articulate a philosophical programme, and if (a) such a metaphilosophy is to be taken as external to the philosophy it investigates all the while (b) elaborating on the substantive theses presiding over said philosophy, then we would need another inquiry external to the metaphilosophy in question, a meta-metaphilosophy. Only then could we discuss the substantive theses with which that first metaphilosophy coincides from another perspective. Even if we expand the inquiry (in regard to the production of that particular philosophy) and consider the metaphilosophical research in general we will not see any difference. If the purpose of such an externally situated research is the discussion of the assumptions and underlying theses of particular philosophies, but it itself consists of underlying theses, then we will need a perspective external to metaphilosophy that analyses these. Hence, this general meta-metaphilosophical investigation will in turn have underlying presumptions and so on.

Regress would only be avoided if we could conduct a metaphilosophical reflection free from any presuppositions. That is, we should hypothesize a kind of ‘pure description’, an objective account of the basic substantive theses of philosophy (or of particular philosophies). However, this leads back to the problem of a purely descriptive metaphilosophy: is this a different kind of investigation? Maybe historical or sociological? Would not these inquiries still be based on substantive theses?

The problem of infinite regress may be solved if one regards the metaphilosophical analysis as an internal activity of philosophy and includes amongst its activities the discussion of its own assumptions. This approach is particularly implemented in Hegel’s speculation.

Finally, the construal of the prefix ‘meta’ as *after* or *post* holds that philosophy has come to an end and that metaphilosophy denotes the theoretical activities after philosophy’s demise. Nicholas Joll (2017: section b) comments that Lazerowitz sometimes used the term ‘metaphilosophy’ in this sense. This take also comes with problems: how is it possible to understand a (metaphilosophical) thinking that reflects on the death of philosophy? Would it not be still a philosophical analysis? The interpretation of the prefix ‘meta’ as *post* runs into difficulties similar to those encountered by the interpretation of ‘meta’ as *above* or *beyond*. These difficulties are intrinsic to the attempt of describing the metaphilosophical inquiry as a theoretical activity that operates differently from and outside philosophy.

Having reviewed the main structural aspects of contemporary metaphilosophical investigation, we can now turn to Hegel and inspect how his philosophy touches on and incorporates questions of metaphilosophy.

Three paradigmatic perspectives on Hegel and metaphilosophy

The word ‘metaphilosophy’ does not belong to Hegel’s vocabulary. This does not necessarily imply that he has not elaborated a metaphilosophy, but it does require that we at least delineate what we mean by this term with reference to him. To this end, we need to understand how contemporary categorizations interact with his thinking. As the previous sections have shown, the definition of metaphilosophy is not univocal: it can be normative-prescriptive, historical-descriptive, internal or external to philosophy. How do these meanings relate to a Hegelian metaphilosophy? Here I will consider three interpretative proposals that exemplify some of the most relevant problems related to the attempt of finding a metaphilosophy in Hegel.

Metaphilosophy as extraneous to the Hegelian project

The first position reads as follows: metaphilosophy is an extraneous programme to the Hegelian project. In his article ‘Hegel on Metaphilosophy and the “Philosophic Spectator”’ Daniel Berthold-Bond argues that Hegel is a radical critic of metaphilosophy. On the author’s view, the term has a very precise meaning: it indicates ‘a preliminary examination of the capacity and nature of knowledge’ (Berthold-Bond 1986: 205). It further advances the idea that knowledge is an instrument requiring a careful

examination of its characteristics and of the appropriateness of its use *before* it can be used. Metaphilosophy thus assumes the role of propaedeutics towards philosophy, something that, according to the author, Hegel denied to be possible.

The crucial text passage supporting this thesis can be found in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* from 1830: 'the examination of knowing cannot take place other than *by way of knowing*. With this so-called instrument, examining it means nothing other than acquiring knowledge of it. But to want to know *before* one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic's wise resolution to learn to *swim, before he ventured into the water*' (EL, §10).⁶

For Hegel 'we can investigate thought only by thinking', therefore there is '*no metaphilosophical level of philosophy itself ...* Philosophy, whose object is thought, is itself the movement of thought' (Berthold-Bond 1986: 208). In other words, there can be no investigation outside of philosophy that scrutinizes what philosophy is. The only possible exploration of philosophy is in its own application.

I basically agree with Berthold-Bond on this point. His conclusions result in limiting the scope: should one want to maintain the possibility of a Hegelian metaphilosophy, the latter should not be understood as *propaedeutic* to philosophy nor as an inquiry beyond or before philosophy. On the contrary, Hegel's metaphilosophy will need to be philosophical itself: it will have to fit the 'philosophy of philosophy' definition.

This leads inevitably to further questions: is Hegel's metaphilosophy an autonomous subpart of his philosophy? (This query seeks to clarify the relationship between philosophy as a whole and metaphilosophy as a part). Or should we rather favour the idea that Hegel's philosophy and metaphilosophy are coextensive? It would follow that each part or development of the former is equally a 'piece' of the latter – I will return to this issue later.

Metaphilosophy as philosophy's self-understanding in relation to its history

The second position depicts Hegel's metaphilosophy as primarily concerned with philosophy's self-understanding and the relationship between philosophy and (its) history. In 'Hegel's Metaphilosophy and Historical Metamorphosis' Robert Bruce Ware contends two main theses: (1) it is misleading to think that for Hegel philosophy is only possible as an act of retrospective understanding, just as (2) it is wrong to claim that Hegel believes his own system has reached the final stage of (the history of) philosophy. As for the first argument, Ware points out that philosophy plays a crucial role for Hegel not only by allowing us to better appreciate the intricacies of an epoch. By understanding we are also given a way to overcome it and lay the ground for a subsequent form of spirit. Indeed, philosophy takes the content on which it operates from its own time, but in doing that, it already transcends such content because in its form – that is, in knowledge – it has produced a distance between itself and the content it has penetrated (see Ware 1996: 253–257).

As for the second argument, Ware claims that Hegel does not see his system as the culmination of philosophy's history. Rather, Hegel believes philosophy has reached the point of self-knowledge, namely 'absolute or philosophical self-consciousness' as the understanding and 'knowledge of the method according to

which the process will continue' (Ware 1996: 275). At this level philosophy grasps itself neither as a particular philosophical form nor as a static opposition between different philosophies, but as the 'universal process of its own development' (Ware 1996: 275). In Hegel's system philosophy becomes self-consciousness of its historical development and its advancement according to the necessary self-determination of logical thought. Every further development of philosophy will take place on the grounds of such awareness of the speculative philosophical method and in accordance with it.⁷

There are three main implications Ware's analysis has to offer. At a general level, Hegel's metaphilosophy has to do with philosophy's self-development and self-knowledge. More precisely: (1) metaphilosophy can be understood as *philosophy's self-consciousness*. In fact, philosophy aims at comprehending itself; (2) philosophy's self-comprehension can only be realized through self-development through time, namely philosophy achieves self-consciousness through its *historical development*; and (3) a central achievement in the process of philosophy's self-consciousness is the awareness of its *method*. The logical and historical unfolding of the method includes its own self-understanding as a decisive threshold: the method must come to know itself. This means that philosophy must comprehend the immanent necessity according to which logical thought determines itself.

The issue of the method also concerns contemporary metaphilosophy: in both contexts it is crucial for the very understanding of the 'nature' of philosophy. Hegel maintains that there can be no philosophical reflection on a method external to the system (and therefore to the unfolding of the method itself). Such a reflection must rather take place within the system to be justified.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* as Hegel's metaphilosophy

The problem associated with an internal or external justification of philosophy leads directly to the third set of problems of finding a metaphilosophy in Hegel. The subheading of Brendan Theunissen's book *Hegels Phänomenologie als metaphilosophische Theorie* explicates these challenges very well: *Hegel und das Problem der Vielfalt philosophischer Theorien. Eine Studie zur systemexternen Rechtfertigungsfunktion der Phänomenologie des Geistes*.⁸ The author's aim is to show that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a metaphilosophical theory whose function is to provide an external justification for the system. This is related to the specific problem a metaphilosophical theory is called upon to solve, namely the multiplicity of philosophical doctrines. In what follows, I shall summarize the main arguments Theunissen's interpretative proposal offers:

1. There are three indicators that characterize metaphilosophical theory:
 - a. it tackles the issue of isostheneia, which arises when incompatible philosophical claims are made that appear both equally in right and in argumentative force;
 - b. in it, doxography is converted into the (meta)philosophical history of philosophy; and
 - c. it is organized as an autonomous theoretical discipline (see Theunissen 2014: 327).

2. As isostheneia is a structural feature of philosophical theories and maintains that all arguments are equally relevant, no further theoretical instruments can be introduced in order to liberate philosophy from it, since the argumentative stalemate would persist on. Instead, we need metaphilosophical means (see Theunissen 2014: 327).
3. A metaphilosophical theory consists of reflections that, from an argumentative point of view, are *independent* from what they recognize as a philosophical theory and that, at the same time, are relevant to it from a position of justification (*begründungsrelevant*; see Theunissen 2014: 327).

On the basis of this account of metaphilosophy, Theunissen exposes how the *Phenomenology of Spirit* fits this model.

4. For Hegel, the *Phenomenology* has the function of elaborating an 'autonomous demonstration [*selbständiger Beweis*], a "justification" [*Rechtfertigung*]' of his theory of what is 'true and real [*wahr und seiend*]' in the last instance (Theunissen 2014: 326).⁹
5. The theory of what is true and real is for Hegel his own system, which comprises a metaphysical grounding discipline (*metaphysische Grundlegungsdisziplin*) and two *Realphilosophie* disciplines: the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit. This also concerns the period in which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*. Even if at that time Hegel presents the *Phenomenology* as the first part of the system and the other three disciplines as the second part, this arrangement does not imply that he understands the *Phenomenology* as a constitutive argumentative part of (i.e. internal to) the system. On the contrary, the *Phenomenology* is first part of the system in the sense of a 'propaedeutic introduction [*propädeutische Einleitung*]' to the second part (Theunissen 2014: 326).
6. The argumentative function of the *Phenomenology* is therefore different from that of the system. In particular, it has a specific *external* demonstrative function.
7. Such an external function must be understood as a metaphilosophical theory.
8. As a metaphilosophical theory, the *Phenomenology* is primarily oriented to the 'problem of the historical-factual multiplicity of philosophical theories' (Theunissen 2014: 328). In particular, a metaphilosophical justification is needed that liberates "science" from its character of isostheneia, so that it can 'present itself as "true science" without any incoherency: that is, we need 'a phenomenological form of metaphilosophical justification' (Theunissen 2014: 329; on this point see ch. 6).
9. In addition, the *Phenomenology* represents for Hegel a form of history of philosophy (see Theunissen 2014: ch. 7, in particular §§7.1.1–7.1.2) (by taking the form of a historical account and corresponding therefore with the second indicator of (1), it becomes more compelling to see it as a metaphilosophical theory).
10. The *Phenomenology* also exhibits the third indicator of a metaphilosophical theory: as a phenomenological discipline, it is a completely autonomous (*ausdifferenziert*) discipline having argumentative autonomy (Theunissen 2014: 331).

Indeed, it is independent from the assumptions and presuppositions (*Annahmen*) of the philosophical theories it considers. The only assumption that Hegel's metaphilosophy depends on is philosophy's character of isostheneia. Yet, this assumption is not bound to the content of the examined philosophies (see Theunissen 2014: 331; see also ch. 9, in particular §9.1).

This point-by-point reconstruction serves to focus on specific issues. The main problem is whether a potential Hegelian metaphilosophy should be internal or external to the system, especially with regard to its justification dynamics. Theunissen's proposal is in line with the second alternative whereas I will argue in the last part of this contribution for the first. There are in fact some difficulties in Theunissen's position.

For one thing, metaphilosophy is portrayed as a preparatory and introductory theory to an actual system. Berthold-Bond also understands metaphilosophy as a propaedeutic investigation, but for this very reason he dismisses it when it comes to Hegel.

This issue is linked to another difficulty of Theunissen's interpretation: is a metaphilosophical enterprise such as the *Phenomenology* philosophical in itself or is it external to philosophy? At the present stage of the investigation, it seems that both hypotheses are valid, which does not help. One part of problem involves the following: the *Phenomenology* is to the system as metaphilosophy is to philosophy (see Theunissen 2014: §7.2.1), and metaphilosophy is independent from an argumentative point of view from the different philosophical positions it considers. This seems to suggest that the *Phenomenology* is not philosophical or should not be, if (2) has to be preserved: as isostheneia defines a structural character of philosophical theories, to rid philosophy from this entanglement, no further theoretical philosophical instruments can be introduced. We need, instead, a metaphilosophical approach. Such a way of thinking seems to establish that the problem of isostheneia cannot be solved inside philosophy itself: external criteria are needed to remedy the situation.

This, however, evokes some of the problems addressed before. Shall metaphilosophy in turn refer to a meta-metaphilosophy that discusses its assumptions and so on indefinitely? On what basis can different metaphilosophies that have the same argumentative force be compared? Do they need criteria external to them? Who or what can judge, for example, whether the assumption of isostheneia as a structural character of philosophy is well founded and legitimate?

Moreover, on the basis of (2), would it be correct to assume that since the *Phenomenology* is a metaphilosophical theory, it does not rely on philosophical theoretical instruments (but only on metaphilosophical ones which are external to philosophy)?

This leads to the second part of the double validity problem: to think of the *Phenomenology* as a metaphilosophy external to philosophy clashes with the fact that Hegel conceives the phenomenological exposition as scientific itself. Theunissen confirms this by defining the *Phenomenology* as an 'introductory science' and, by quoting Hegel, as a 'science of the experience of consciousness' (see Theunissen 2014: 331).

In contrast to Theunissen's general interpretation, I believe that for Hegel the philosophical system has in itself the means to rediscuss its assumptions without having to resort to an external point of view. In the Hegelian model, the refutation of positions that are overcome and at the same time preserved is an essential aspect of the way philosophy justifies itself as a scientific system.

To develop and unfold this peculiarity in Hegel's system, I will pick up on some of the aspects previously discussed: the connection (that both Theunissen and Ware underscore) between a metaphilosophical theory and the history of philosophy; thought's self-determination and self-development; the link between metaphilosophy, philosophy's process towards self-knowledge and the question of method (Ware).

Hegelian philosophy and metaphilosophy: an example of 'self-containment'

If there is one text that lays out Hegel's position on the main topics discussed in contemporary metaphilosophy, a, as it were, 'ready to use' guide, it probably would be the introduction to the 1830 *Encyclopaedia* (§§ 1–18). There we can find a distillate of Hegel's view on various themes: the nature of philosophy, its object, its method, its 'tools' and its characterizing activity;¹⁰ its mission and its aims;¹¹ its relationship to other disciplines;¹² its internal partition;¹³ its progress and results.¹⁴ It also gives insight to Hegel's position on the autonomy and objectivity of philosophy. This latter aspect corresponds with the extensively explored idea that metaphilosophical examination can be understood as a scrutiny and discussion of the substantive theses (or assumptions) of a certain philosophical programme.

It may seem that the introductory paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* allow a first glimpse of Hegel's metaphilosophy. However, from a Hegelian perspective, there is nothing philosophical or metaphilosophical about them. They are neither philosophical, because they are not justified through the scientific exposition, nor are they metaphilosophical since it only makes sense to seek a metaphilosophy in Hegel if it is philosophical itself: if it is integrated into philosophy.

The very first paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia* questions the idea that the introduction Hegel is offering is already philosophical: philosophy can neither presuppose the object (the truth as the development of the Idea) nor the method (the self-movement of truth) of its investigation. Both must be demonstrated within the scientific exposition of philosophy itself, namely within the system. It is precisely this particular relation to presuppositions, somewhat inconvenient yet connected to freedom, that defines the autonomy and objectivity of philosophy. The philosophical activity 'includes the requirement to demonstrate the *necessity* of its content, and to *prove* not only its being but, even more so, the determinations of its objects'. Hegel continues: 'to make or accept *presuppositions* or *assurances*' regarding those aspects 'appears illegitimate' (EL, §1).

Such observations are extremely relevant to the attempt of tracing a metaphilosophy in Hegel as internal to philosophy's reflection on itself. The introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* alone cannot exhaust Hegel's metaphilosophy precisely because it does

not fulfil one of his main criteria according to which one can speak of philosophy as science: the demonstration and justification of the necessity of the content determinations within the scientific exposition. Therefore, we must look for Hegel's metaphilosophy *within* the development of his philosophy, as a reflection that philosophy conducts on itself. This means that the points declared in the introduction (which mirror the theoretical agenda of contemporary metaphilosophy) must be justified within the system.

Coextension of philosophy and metaphilosophy in the development of the system

My claim is that in Hegel's system philosophy and metaphilosophy are coextensive. Hegel aims to demonstrate his conception of philosophy (with all the related issues) within the development of philosophy as a system. Philosophy and metaphilosophy are therefore coextensive in the sense that the whole self-justification provided by the Hegelian philosophical system is also a justification of Hegel's metaphilosophy. As we have seen, Hegel's understanding of philosophy's progression includes two decisive aspects: each stage in which philosophy determines itself needs to be (1) justified within this process so that it can be (2) seen as an advancement in self-knowledge. Both aspects involve the demonstration of the assumptions contained in the content determinations of the Idea and the overcoming of the one-sidedness of each determination (see EL, §§12 R and 14 R); this exposition provides the proof of the necessity to pass to the next determination.

With regard to this momentum, Hegel affirms that 'progression in philosophy would be rather a retrogression and a grounding' (SL, 48).¹⁵ This holds in several ways: firstly, philosophy's advancement should demonstrate that the beginning (from which the philosopher must take her starting point in the exposition of science) 'was not just an arbitrary assumption but was in fact *the truth*, and *the first truth* at that' (SL, 48). Secondly, in the development of the system it is the subsequent determination that founds the previous one.¹⁶ Thirdly, it must be demonstrated 'that *progression* is a retreat to the *ground*, to the *origin* and the *truth* on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends' (SL, 49).

This progression – that is rather a retrogression and a grounding – defines, on a general level, the way in which presuppositions are sublated, including the presupposed beginning (see EL, §1). This means that what 'appears to be an *immediate* one, must transform itself into a *result* within the science itself' (EL, §17). In relation to the metaphilosophical problem of the unveiling and discussion of presuppositions, one can then say that the development of Hegel's philosophical system already includes this aspect, thus excluding the use of an external point of view.

Self-containment

To say that in Hegel's system philosophy and metaphilosophy are coextensive does not fully illuminate the nature of their relationship. My suggestion is to understand it as a relationship of self-containment. For this, I shall reintroduce an aspect highlighted by

Ware: Hegel's metaphilosophy concerns the self-understanding of philosophy as the comprehension of its own method.

The notion of self-containment derives from a paradox discovered by both Russell and Zermelo, whereby some classes contain themselves as members. By applying this insight on the relation between philosophy and metaphilosophy, one can view Hegel's philosophy as the one in which the whole (i.e. philosophy) has also itself as a part.¹⁷ This understanding is supported by Hegel's idea that philosophy's aim is that of self-knowledge.

In contemporary terms, we could translate philosophy's self-knowledge as the 'philosophy of philosophy' or 'philosophical reflection on philosophy'. For all that has already been said, the philosophical reflection on philosophy is an essential element of Hegel's conception of its development as a system: in its unfolding, philosophy as a systematic whole thematizes itself, it becomes object to itself. In other words, it makes itself part of its own self-development. This particularly emerges in the Doctrine of the Concept of the *Science of Logic* (and in the corresponding section of the *Encyclopaedia*) as well as in the encyclopaedic section on Absolute Spirit: the philosophical reflection as a whole becomes part of itself by thematizing itself: by making itself the object of its own reflective activity. This self-reflection involves the articulation of the metaphilosophical (and, as argued, equally philosophical) contents mentioned in the introductory paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia*.

The notion of self-containment also allows us to understand the relationship between philosophy as a form of knowledge and its content: the former does not apply to an external matter. Philosophy does not unfold through determinations external to it; its content is produced out of itself through itself: its content is itself, namely the development of thought. The articulation of such a content also constitutes the way in which philosophy comprehends itself in its 'nature', in its relationship to the other sciences, to religion, to art and through which it justifies its object and method. The culmination of the process is philosophy's grasp of its own concept. 'This concept of philosophy is *the self-thinking Idea*, the knowing truth (§ 236), the logical with the meaning that it is the universality *verified* in the concrete content as in its actuality. In this way science has returned to its beginning, and the logical is its *result* as the spiritual' (EPM, §574).

The concluding section of the *Encyclopaedia*, dedicated to philosophy itself, leads back to what had been acquired at the end of the *Science of Logic*: the truth that knows itself, the 'pure concept conceptually comprehending itself' (SL, 753). The pure concept that comprehends itself is therefore both the result of the science of logic and of the philosophy of spirit, which establishes itself as the Idea's return to itself through the mediation of the sphere of nature.

This result refers in particular to the question of method. It is in the section on method (at the end of the *Science of Logic*) that philosophy's reflection on its own immanent movement – namely the movement of the concept – is explicitly discussed. Here the logical form knows itself as its own content of itself. It is so, we could say, in a twofold sense: both because the content is constituted by the determinations in which the form differentiates itself and because at the culmination of the logical movement

the absolute form thematizes itself as the movement immanent to the development of each determined content.¹⁸

One may believe that the section of the *Science of Logic* dedicated to the method and the final section of the Philosophy of Spirit, concerned with philosophy, constitute the summa of Hegel's metaphilosophy. However, although those parts accentuate philosophical reflection on philosophy itself more explicitly, Hegel's metaphilosophy cannot be limited to those sections, since the whole process of resultant justification is essential as well.

Philosophy and the history of philosophy in Hegel's metaphilosophy

One last characteristic can be described in regard to Hegel's metaphilosophy, namely the relationship between philosophy and its history. This issue is relevant to what has been said about the osmotic, co-constitutive relationship between prescriptive and descriptive metaphilosophy.

Hegel's own approach serves as a perfect case: his prescriptive metaphilosophy – specifically, his view of what philosophy should be and how and why it should be done – also implies a historical-philosophical interpretation of what philosophy has been thought to be and of how and why it has been done.

This is evident, for instance, in the lectures on the history of philosophy, where Hegel recognizes a coincidence between the historical development of the philosophical thought – and thus the vast production of different philosophical positions that may also contradict one another – and the purely logical development of the determinations of thought.¹⁹

Hegel's reading of the history of philosophy (his 'descriptive metaphilosophy', using Rescher's expression) is inseparable from his prescriptive metaphilosophy, that is, from his conception of what philosophy should be. His reconstruction of the history of philosophy is organized around specific normative assumptions whereby the philosophical system itself is tasked to justify and demonstrate these assumptions. Examples of such assumptions are the concreteness of thought;²⁰ the conception of philosophy as thought's development from simple and abstract determinations to more concrete ones;²¹ and determinate negation as intrinsic to the movement of reason's self-determination.²²

What is relevant here is that Hegel's system does not omit its own normative assumptions – the 'substantive theses', we might say – but makes them explicit and shows how they are integrated within the system: on the one hand, Hegel tries to justify these assumptions within the philosophical system, exhibiting how they work and develop; on the other hand, he proceeds to reconstructing the way in which they inform the historical evolution of thought.

For these reasons, Hegel's approach does not fall into the pit of infinite regress when seeking an ultimate foundation of (meta)philosophical assumptions. Instead, it provides an example of how historical-philosophical instances are integrated into a prescriptive metaphilosophical theory whereas justification itself is obtained immanently.

Conclusion

To summarize, first, what currently is understood as a metaphilosophical investigation is for Hegel a necessary part of philosophy and cannot be a propaedeutic or introductory inquiry. At the same time, metaphilosophy cannot justify philosophy externally, as philosophy is tasked to provide its own self-justification by overcoming its presuppositions.

Second, if we consider the topics contemporary metaphilosophy is concerned with, it becomes clear that Hegel has elaborated his position in regard to those topics and has tried to justify his view within the development of his system.

Third, in Hegel's speculation, philosophy and metaphilosophy can be understood in terms of a relationship of self-containment, within which the whole also has itself as a part. Philosophy's dialectical process is equally a process of self-knowledge that encompasses and thematizes this very self-knowledge in its own development. In Hegel's terms, this means that philosophy's progression is also the exposition of its (own) concept.

Thereby, a connection between the metaphilosophical inquiry and the question of method (a central theme also for contemporary metaphilosophy) can be made. For Hegel the method defines the immanent movement of the whole scientific development and is explicitly thematized at the end of the *Logic*: here it is the philosophical thought itself that theorizes the way it 'works', that is, it explains the necessary movement of conceptual thought and therefore of philosophy itself. On Hegel's account, the method is justified and demonstrated within the scientific exposition, so there is no need for further justification criteria – external to philosophy – to judge assumptions internal to philosophy.

Finally, while it is already difficult in today's context to make a clear distinction between prescriptive and descriptive metaphilosophy, such distinction is all the less applicable to Hegel because of his normative conception of the history of philosophy. Rather, the Hegelian model shows how a historical-philosophical interpretation is constitutive of a prescriptive metaphilosophical vision and vice versa.

As can be seen, contemporary metaphilosophical categories do not find a perfect application in Hegel. On the contrary, they are put into question. In this regard, we can formulate some hypotheses about the way Hegel's thought could profit the current debate. There are at least two incisive aspects, which I merely will point out.

The first aspect consists in recognizing that unveiling and discussing assumptions, as well as retrieving and justifying normative criteria are activities characterizing philosophy and internal to it. This implies excluding the possibility of a metaphilosophy external to philosophy, which evaluates philosophy on the grounds of a non-philosophical investigation and also regards philosophy being methodologically independent (though not detached) from other disciplines.

The second aspect is Hegel's interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy. As argued above, it could help question the relationship between a (purely) descriptive metaphilosophy and a (purely) prescriptive metaphilosophy. A metaphilosophy that is only descriptive and external to philosophy not only gives rise to the problems I have highlighted before but also represents, from a Hegelian perspective, an anti-philosophical inquiry. As Hegel puts it, 'a feature of

the philosophical mode of treatment is that we likewise reflect upon what we have thought, and do not leave it as it immediately is' (LHP I, 45). That means, it is one of philosophy's characteristics to address what has been thought and, in doing that, to modify it. Thinking primarily is a transformational activity that elevates what is given or found from its condition of givenness and immediacy. Moreover, a pure description claiming to be impartial is for Hegel a dead matter, devoid of spirit.

What one calls 'impartiality' ... is the stance that approaches philosophy in spiritless fashion, that is not present to it with one's own spirit. ... Impartiality consists, then, in neutrality with respect to thoughts, to concepts, to thinking spirit. But if one actually wants to study it [philosophy], one must have taken the side of thinking spirit and thought.

(LHP I, 63–64)

So why should a contemporary (meta)philosopher turn to Hegel? There are various reasons. For one thing, he offers a model of normative (meta)philosophy that does not disregard the historical development of thought or, which is the same, a model of historical (meta)philosophy that does not disregard a normative conception of thought. Moreover, Hegel's (meta)philosophical model integrates in the exposition of philosophy (which is also a metaphilosophical exposition) the justification of normative assumptions, transforming them from presuppositions to mediated results. At the same time, this model has no claim to impartiality, since it takes a position with respect to thought, but has the ambition of not being arbitrary, because it vindicates and tries to demonstrate the necessity of the method and the contents in which (meta) philosophy develops.

Altogether, these elements may converge into a positive construction of philosophy's self-image, while providing us with robust tools to defend the autonomy and rational legitimacy of philosophical activity.

Notes

- 1 I will not dwell on this topic here, but it is interesting to note that one factor contributing to the emergence of metaphilosophy as an autonomous branch may have been 'Analytic philosophy having become aware of itself as a tradition' (Joll 2017: section c).
- 2 For all such aspects, see in particular: Rescher (2006: 1; 2014: X), Williamson (2007: ix–x), Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood (2013: VII and 9–13) and Joll (2017).
- 3 This question is connected to the recent confrontation between 'armchair philosophy' and 'experimental philosophy'. The former uses methods that can be carried out sitting in an armchair (mental experiments, conceptual analysis, etc.) without resorting to 'measurement, observation or experiment' (Williamson 2007: 1). Experimental philosophers, instead, 'regard philosophy as a straightforward part of empirical science' and think 'that philosophy should be done using the established methods of empirical science' (Williamson 2007: 27). On these issues see,

- in particular, Knobe and Nichols (2008, 2014), Horvath and Grundmann (2012) and Haug (2014).
- 4 This means, in contrast to Rescher's position, that the alleged descriptive metaphilosophy itself clashes with the problem of disagreement. On these issues, see also Theunissen (2014: 112).
 - 5 On this, see Reese (1990).
 - 6 The *Encyclopaedia Logic* is quoted according to Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation.
 - 7 In her recent volume *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely*, Nuzzo (2018: 35–72) offers an original and articulated interpretation of Hegel's account of his method, stressing the interaction of a retrospectively descriptive dimension and a normative one that converge in the final consciousness of his method.
 - 8 The full title translated would surmount to: *Hegel's Phenomenology as a Metaphilosophical Theory. Hegel and the Problem of Diversity in Philosophical Theories. A Study on the System-external Function of Justification in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. Thomas Cannaday).
 - 9 Translations of the quotations from Theunissen's book are mine.
 - 10 In short, 'philosophy may initially be defined as the *thoughtful examination* [*denkende Betrachtung*] of things' (EL, §2); its activity is to replace 'representation with *thoughts and categories*, but more specifically with *concepts*' (§3 R, see also §§1 and 5); its primary object is truth: specifically, philosophy treats 'the sphere of finite things, the sphere of *nature* and the *human spirit*' and 'their relation to each other' as well as to truth (§1); philosophy cannot presuppose its method (see §1); 'only *thinking* ... should properly be called an instrument of philosophy' (§7 R).
 - 11 Philosophy aims 'to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that *exists* [*mit der seienden Vernunft*], or with actuality' (EL, §6); 'its sole purpose, activity and goal' is 'to attain the concept of its concept' (§17): that is, the concept of science must be comprehended by science itself.
 - 12 Philosophy shares its objects with religion, but 'would have to prove its *capacity* to know them by its own lights' and 'to *justify* its own diverging determinations' (EL, §4). With respect to the other sciences, philosophy 'acknowledges and utilizes as its own content the universal produced by these sciences' and furthermore 'it introduces into those categories others as well and validates them' (§9 R, see also §12 R).
 - 13 Each part of philosophy is 'a philosophical whole, a circle coming to closure within itself' in which 'the philosophical idea exists in a particular determinacy or element' (EL, §15); the parts of the philosophical system are: Logic, Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Spirit (see §18).
 - 14 This topic includes the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy, namely between speculative science and its historical evolution (see EL, §13).
 - 15 The *Science of Logic* is quoted according to di Giovanni's translation.
 - 16 On this, see Miolli (2016: 187–190).
 - 17 Regarding Hegel's philosophy, Ware interprets the relationship of self-containment as a structure whereby 'the universal totality is contained within each of its component parts, such that every part is an expression of the whole' (Ware 1996: 258).
 - 18 See EL, §§237, 243. For a more detailed analysis of the question of method, see Miolli (2016: 265–270).
 - 19 See LHP I, 14: 'Philosophy is ... an exposition of the development of thought in the figure of simple thought, without additions; the history of philosophy expresses

this development as it has developed over time.’ Without having to embrace Hegel’s account of the history of philosophy entirely, the intertwining between historical and conceptual processes – and thus the ‘fusion’ of historical and normative metaphilosophy – offers an original take on logic: ‘the achievement of Hegel’s logic consists in his insight into the historicity of all categorical and conceptual forms and his recognition that particular developments ... need to be reconstructed as instantiations of general developmental forms’ (Stekeler-Weithofer 2016: 42).

- 20 See LHP I, 48: ‘Thought is nothing empty or abstract, but is determinative, indeed is self-determining. In other words, thought is essentially concrete.’
- 21 See LHP I, 53–54: ‘In philosophy the first thoughts are the most abstract, the simplest, the most insubstantial ones. The following stages are more concrete. Each new stage is development ... So a new development adds a new determination to the initial one, and thus each successive stage of development is richer, is augmented by this determination, and is consequently more concrete.’
- 22 See LHP I, 59–60.

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